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PII Redacted

Balkany
My hometown, and the Shoa

By Olga Elbogen (Berkovits)

Balkany is still in front of my eyes – every street, every face, everyone I ever came in contact with. Its very painful to remember all those wonderful people. To know that most of them were gassed in Auschwitz is heartbreaking, even after 57 years.

I was born there. I lived my busy, happy 21 years among my wonderful, loving, happy family and all my good friends, schoolmates, neighbors and acquaintances with whom we never had any disagreements – ever. Walking on the street, with every other step I made, there were people to greet. Everyone said hello – we all knew each other.

Balkany is a village in Eastern Hungary in the District of Szabolcs, in the Nyirseg.
A population of approximately seven thousand including the surrounding farms included tradesmen, small businessmen, poor farmhands who worked for the dozen or so rich landowners for very minimal pay, just scarcely able to live from hand to mouth.
Among these people lived about 100 Jewish families, seemingly in understanding and mutual respect among the Christian population.
Among the Jews there were also small businessmen, tradesmen, the only drugist, one of the mill owners and two lumberyard owners.
There was a Hungarian state-supported Jewish elementary school where our very well loved and respected teacher Stern Farkas taught six grades in a one-room schoolhouse.
The Jewish Community lived in friendly and peaceful harmony.

We had a very beautiful synagogue – its magnificent colors and design are still in front of my eyes – which everyone attended, some on Saturdays and Holidays, some daily and then there were those who couldn't imagine not going to pray in the synagogue twice a day.

The Jewish Community was led by our saintly Rav Yekutiel Lichtenstein.

During World War I, serving in the Hungarian Army, many Jewish men lost their lives and left behind many orphan children. Our Rav Lichtenstein founded a home to raise and educate these war orphans. They raised money and got charity even from the United States to keep

up this orphanage. The children received religious as well as secular education. War orphans were accepted not only from Balkany but from all the surrounding towns and villages, and were very well treated.

After these children outgrew this home, it came time to teach them a trade to be able to be self-sufficient and independent. So, again, our Rav Lichtenstein and his sons raised charity to found the first Hungarian Talith factory. Here the boys learned a trade and worked until they got married or found jobs elsewhere. All these boys became diligent and useful citizens of Balkany and the country.

Later they extended the factory, made window shades and also experimented with manufacturing shoe polish boxes.

It was a near tragedy when sometime in the end of the 1930's the factory burned down. They tried to rebuild it, but it was never the same again. For some families that was the only source of income.

There is a lot I could write about the Lichtenstein family – extraordinarily goodhearted, always ready to lend a helping hand to those in need. In this the Rav's grown sons had a lion's share. When our Rav Lichtenstein got sick and couldn't tend to everything, one of his sons took over – not just the community and rabbinical part, but the factory as well. The younger boys gave a helping hand with this - they all had their duties and responsibilities. They were extraordinary people - one by one. Everything they accomplished proved it.

What really happened to this wonderful family? I'll try to explain in a nutshell:

Our Rav's only daughter, Rossika, got married to Rabbi Avraham Klein from Tornalja which was Czechoslovakia then. Luckily, they were hidden there by a wonderful Christian family with their eight children. They did survive the war, except one little boy who happened to be in Balkany for Passover and was deported to Auschwitz with the Lichtenstein family.

The oldest son, Avraham Josef, Rabbi of Nyiracsad, was deported to Auschwitz with his whole family. None of them survived.

The second son, Reb Hillel who was the substitute rabbi, was deported to Auschwitz with his wife and his three beautiful, blond, curly-haired little children with us, in the same wagon.

Our dear Rav Lichtenstein was dragged on a stretcher, with the Rebecin at his side and the youngest son Itsik.

One of their sons, Sieh, with some extraordinary luck, somehow escaped and reached Palestine in around 1940.

They had two more boys - Moshe and Jidu.

From all these, only Reb Hillel came out of the war alive or rather half dead. The doctors gave up on his life but the two Klein sisters, Gita and Beilu, took him in and nursed him with faithful devotion for six weeks until he could stand on his feet again.

I have a letter from Reb Hillel which he wrote to me to Sweden, after the war, answering my questions. From him I do know my dear parents', grandfather and six little sisters and brothers exact yarzeit date (date of death). It is Iyar 23. He knows. He was there. He saw them go into the gas chambers. Dr. Mengele sent them there.

Luckily, Reb Hillel somehow found himself on the right side with his brother Jidu who was about my age. After a horrible, bitter year of suffering, Reb Hillel survived, but Jidu couldn't take all the tortures and horrors and two weeks before the liberation he couldn't fight it anymore. I remember what a bright and brilliant boy he was. In school he was skipped to a higher class more than once.
May all who perished there rest in peace. We will never forget them.

Reb Hillel's letter, which is included at the end of these writings, so truly mirrors the survivors' state of mind at the time and the "warm welcome" they received from the village's Christian population.

My Family

I would like to remember something from every family, but let me start with my own, the Berkovits family, because its the one I really know well. Sorry to say, but as a child I was hardly interested in the family tree. When I wanted to know more, there was no one to ask.

What I do know is that, in around 1900, my grandfather, Bernat Berkovits, bought the house in which we lived. I know that is when they moved to Balkany because my Uncle Jeno Berkovits was born there in 1902. My father was born in 1896 in Peterreve, which later became

Yugoslavia. My father had a little sister who was born in 1900. They moved to Peterreve to try their luck. Looks like they didn't succeed because they moved back to Szabolcs County. They wanted to be near the family. My grandfather's parents lived in Budszentmihaly. They are buried there – Mor Berkovits and his wife Katalina Adler. I remember grandfather going to visit their graves yearly.

Now that I look back upon my childhood, I see how beautiful it was to live in the same house with my grandparents. They lived in the other end of the house. When my father or mother just raised their voice at me I cried and ran to grandmother to complain. She would take my hand and we would run to my parents – Grandma would be greatly agitated and would hold them responsible for my crying: "How dare you yell at this wonderful child? I'm sure she didn't deserve it and it should not happen again." I felt better right away. And then, it happened many times that someone would come in, look at little Annie and remark: "What a beautiful child she is!" My grandmother would immediately pipe in: "But Olga is also beautiful!" Such and similar episodes remain in my mind forever. I loved her dearly.
Or when I happened to walk in when she was having a glass of tea, she would quickly get a small liquor glass and give me a few spoonsful. Then we would have tea together – it tasted delicious and I felt so big.

Another thing I can't forget is, upon coming home from kindergarten, I would first sing and dance for my grandmother what I learned that day. I just adored her and that's why it hurt so much when we lost her when I was only nine years old.

In those days, they kept the corpse at home, in the house, stretched out on the floor with a brick under her head. My heart went out to see that. So, when I thought no one was looking, I bent down and kissed her ice-cold face. One year later, my grandfather remarried, but I could never call that woman grandmother.

In 1914, when World War I broke out, my father just turned 18 and was called into the Hungarian Army. He served four years until the war ended, when he went home as a sergeant with two medals of honor – one silver and one bronze. Later, in the 1940's, this exempted him from the Anti-Jewish Laws. That is, the Anti-Jewish Laws did not apply to those who received these medals. My father's identification document was subsequently marked with large Z's, but were crossed out under which it read "Protected Person" ("Kivetelezett Egyen").

Three years after the war, my father got married to a very pretty girl from Nyiregyhaza who became his wife and, later, my mother. First my father opened a grocery store in our own building. This was not interesting enough for him and it didn't contribute much to Balkany. He decided to open a library – something new that Balkany never had before. He took only a very minimal deposit for the books so that it could be affordable to everyone. This was the reason people didn't think it important to return the books and soon the library became so small that it didn't pay to keep it up and that was the end of that.

We kept the remaining books at home, so I started to read. By the age of 13 or 14, I had already read Tolstoy's War and Peace, Anna Karenina, Dostoyevsky's Crime and Punishment and whatever else was available at home, for there was no other library in Balkany ever since.

After that, my father opened a perfumery – this again was a first in Balkany. It took time until the people got used to the idea of stepping into a perfumery. It was too city-like. Balkany remains a village even today.

After a short few years, my father decided to become a chemist. He spoke to Geza Herskovits in Nyiregyhaza who was the owner of "Verbena Drogeria". He agreed to come to Balkany on Sundays, when his drug store was closed, to teach my father to become a chemist, to manufacture "Sosborszesz" spirit of salt, blue wash and mostly cosmetics. I remember, as a very young girl, I helped sift the powder in a silk sifter many times. I don't remember how long the course took, but I know that it was a long summer in which Geza Herskovits spent every Sunday with us.

With this, we started to manufacture the items. We ordered the bottles from a glass bottle factory in Satoraljaujhely. We planned and designed the labels at home and had them made in Budapest. It was named "Anna Sosborszesz" after my sister Anna. That this was similar to the leading brand "Diana Sosborszesz" was purely accidental, of course. At "Diana", they couldn't understand this and for many years we were in a legal battle with them. They insisted that they had a copyright on all similar names.

The chemistry was going nicely. We had a salesman who traveled the country and sent in orders weekly. We at home did the packaging and mailing. The blooming business and the battle with "Diana" came to an end with the introduction of the Anti-Jewish Laws, when the permit was taken away from us (even though my father was a protected person by

law because of his wartime medals for heroism).

At the same time, my grandfather's liquor and other alcoholic beverage distribution license was also revoked, so our little world became even smaller.

In the meantime, my father was corresponding with his uncle in the U.S.A., begging him to send affidavits for the family. He never even answered. My father didn't give up and kept writing and asking for that affidavit, promising to pay every penny it would cost him. Finally, we did get that long-awaited affidavit, but it was too late. Italy joined the war, France was occupied and Germany didn't let any Jews through so that there was no way out of Hungary. We really got stuck. That uncle at that time had two college boys. One of them is now a Federal judge. I saw his name in the newspaper a few times. In fact, I have the papers to this very day with his picture in it. I saved it because he looks so much like my father did – it scared me.
I feel they could have saved my parents, my six sisters and brothers and my grandfather should they have acted in time. This is why I never got in touch with these cousins. We lived in New York for 40 years and believe me was tempted many times.

Maybe it sounds a little strange that a man with such little worldly education, a deeply religious, orthodox Jew could have so much innovation, many ideas and such liberal openness, introducing new things. My father had these qualities since he was a child. When he finished the six elementary classes, grandfather wanted him to go to a far-away Yeshiva, but my father had other ideas. There was a Yeshiva in Verbo, which at that time served as a teachers' seminary. This was my father's dream. He knew that his father wouldn't agree so fast, so he, himself, enrolled in the Verbo Yeshiva, by correspondence. (Only grandmother knew about it.) When he left home, he didn't go to the Yeshiva of his father's choice, but went straight to Verbo. Only when he was there did he write to his father about his decision and asked for his permission and blessing. Grandfather was very upset and wrote to the Dean of the school instructing him to send his son home right away. He would never agree to let him stay there. They answered that they had already tested the boy, that he was very talented and would he please let him stay. "Put him on a train right away and send him home," answered grandfather, otherwise, not only would he disown him, but he would consider him dead, would sit shiva after him, and would never want to see him again if he ever went off his religious ways. Grandmother tried to convince him, without success. Grandfather won and his son went to

the Yeshiva of his choice.

After all this, my father learned and read secular books without his father's knowledge. We children found the books hidden in the attic. This he did so successfully, that when members of the congregation had a disagreement and went a "Din Torah", they literally fought for Lajos Berkovits to be their mediator or lawyer. In those days, the Jewish people did not go to the public authorities, but to the Rabbi for the administration of justice.

Of course, if someone had to correspond with the authorities, or if someone had a request of the ministry, again, Lajos Berkovits was the one to do it. He did this gladly and naturally, giving good advice, as well.

But let me go back to the events in chronological succession. When I finished the sixth grade, in the summer, I took a sewing course. My parents were not happy with this choice – such a skinny child should not sit and sew her whole life. My father had a better idea – Balkany didn't have a beautician yet – why not become one. So I did.

All of a sudden, it became stylish to have a non-intellectual trade. Many believed that the Jews would be removed from Hungary and sent to Madagaskar or god knows where. The newspapers had English lessons in them. We, the youngsters, gathered in one of the schoolrooms and started to learn English. We also had a record player and used records. Slowly, the boys were called in to forced labor. The group became smaller each day and so eventually the English lessons stopped.

I was not yet 15 years old when my parents took me to Debrecen, signed me up for a six-month course in ladies' hairdressing which I successfully completed. That's the way I became Balkany's first and only ladies' hairdresser. Later, this proved very helpful because in the war years, cosmetics were considered a luxury and the Perfumery's income was greatly reduced.

In the family, I was the oldest child. I had seven younger sisters and brothers, who were all beautiful. When I studied in Debrecen, I cried at night so that no one would see. That is how homesick I was for my little sisters and brothers, especially for little Lacika, who was the baby. Whenever I thought of him, my eyes filled with tears. When I returned six month later, Lacika didn't recognize me, but slowly we became friends again. A long time afterwards, when I reprimanded him for something, he started to cry and said: "You can't yell at me, you are not

even ours. You just came and stayed." I'll never forget it. It felt like a stab in my heart that this child, whom I loved so much, lived in the disillusion that I just came and stayed. It hurts me 'til today. Lacika was seven, in second grade, at the time we were deported from home.

Annd then there was little Iluska – ten years younger than me - a very beautiful child whom I happily dressed in ruffles and ribbons and made big organdy bows for her hair. That's how she went to kindergarten and later to school. She was 11, in fifth grade, when we were deported.

Anni, the only one of the seven sisters and brothers who survived the holocaust with me, loved to be in the kitchen, but she also helped out in the business. From the beginning, she was mother's "right hand". She cooked and baked and was the perfect little housekeeper which she is to this day.

Edith, 17 years old at the time of the Deportation, was tall, slim with a good figure and a good mind. In the wagons going to Auschwitz, probably due to unsanitary conditions, she got a small sore on her eyebrow, so we covered it with a handkerchief so dust wouldn't get to it, which was the reason she was sent to the left by Dr. Mengele.

Miklos, the oldest of the boys, was 16 years old. He traveled to Nyiregyhaza daily, to help out in an electronic business where the owner was called in to forced labor.

Sandor, 14 years old, was still in school when we were deported from home.

And then there was Gyurika, everybody's favorite, three years old at deportation.

I could write a lot more about each child, but I decided to do it in a nutshell because the pain of all I went through and suffered is not as painful as the pain of loosing such a wonderful family under such horrible circumstances, in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

From Balkany to Auschwitz

March 19, 1944 - The German Army occupied Hungary. In just a few days, a law went into affect that every Jewish person had to wear a yellow Star of David on the left side of his chest – from little babies to the very oldest. Noncompliance was punished by the death penalty. I started

making the yellow stars for everyone who asked – friends and neighbors and whoever needed it. I was there to produce them – god forbid anyone should get in trouble because of it. Most of the Jewish people chose not to walk in the street unnecessarily and certainly not alone. I was very daring and proudly wore the yellow star. Because I was the only hairdresser in the village, I was invited into every house of the Christian intelligentsia – from the rich landowners, the senior civil servants, to the Protestant clergyman's wife, to the teachers and even the gendarme's wives were my clientele. I went into every one of these homes. With the yellow star on my heart, I went into these houses. None of them made any remarks and none of them showed any sympathy either. They just ignored it.

The last day of Passover, in the afternoon, the streets became very busy with Christian men, young and old. They all went to the municipality for a meeting. As we later learned, they were instructed how to be of service during the deportation of the Jews. They were informed about how and what would be happening to the Jews. We had absolutely no idea. The air was full of gunpowder. We worried about the men coming home from shul, so we girls went to take them home. On the way, we met a neighbor, Mrs. Kalman Klein. Her husband got stuck in Budapest and couldn't come home for Passover so we invited her to our seders. Mrs. Klein's tenant was the Godeny Sofor. He told Mrs. Klein that at the meeting, they received instructions for the next few days, how to assist with the deportation of the Jews. All the Christians were told, in strict secrecy, (not a word to us) that we were going to be deported and sent to ghettos.

The mood in our circles was very tense. No one knew what to expect. Sadness reigned everywhere.

In the afternoon, the second civil servant from the municipality, Jancsi Szabo, stopped in to say that all of a sudden he needed a few bottles of perfume and other little things. Of course, he knew nothing of what was going on. He had no idea. " Just write it down, put it on my account."

In the evening, some of the neighbors dared to come over to find out what was going on. My father tried to put them at ease: "Wherever they take us, we will all be together. We will work and we will survive the little time left until the war is over."

Months before this, the Jewish Community received a letter from one of the forced labor camps in which a Christian guy from Balkany was

Sergeant of the squad. He created inhuman conditions for the poor Jewish forced laborers. He tortured them and made life miserable for them. They asked the management to please try to do something about it. Of course they did try. They formed a delegation of three people to go to his wife, asked her help to try to influence her husband to ease the suffering of those innocent people. She promised to do so aand for this they gave her money as a gift for her goodwill. As soon as her husband heard this, he reported the delegation of three people to the highest military court. These three men were: Reb. Hillel Lichtenstein, Berkovits Lajos and Roth Miklos. They were summoned to the military court for a hearing. We were all terrified as to what would happen. Very sadly, Auschwitz solved the problem.

After the Germans occupied Hungary, the Jewish Community received a letter from the Budapest Central Headquarters to form a "Jewish Council" of three people who would deal with the Germans, or rather the Germans would deal with them only and would be completely responsible to the Germans. We shivered just listening to all this when my father came home from Shul and told us that, once again, the same three people where chosen – Reb. Hillel Lichternstein, Lajos Berkovitz and Miklos Roth. We had every reason to worry – this was no simple task. The "Jewish Council" would be responsible for every single person. How can you solve this honestly? This problem was also solved by Auschwitz.

I have to mention that, much before this, on the day of Yom Kippur 1942, the rooster-feathered gendarme went into the Synagogue to arrest Csillag Bela. They took him out and nobody ever saw him again. He simply dissappeared from the face of the earth.

It just so happened that Csillag Bela had a very nice piece of land and one of the neighbors kept an eye on it. They didn't need anything else but to report him to the authorities with any lie, without any proof, and all was taken care of.

It is still the last day of Passover. We all went to sleep with a very heavy heart. We didn't know what tomorrow would bring. The following morning, April 15, 1944, I woke up at seven like every Sunday, got ready for work, took my bag with my tools and was ready to leave. At 8 o'clock I was supposed to be at the home of Mrs. Szenczy, the Protestant Clergyman's wife, after which I was to go to Ujhelyi Jolan, a spinster teacher and then to the Godeny Laszlo estate far on the edge of the village. Usually, by the time I got home, some of my clients would be waiting for me there.

As I tried to leave the house, I saw that young Paramilitary Leventes with weapons on their shoulders were stationed at the entrance to our house and they would not let me leave. I argued with them that I had to get to work, but to no avail. They slammed the door in my face. I ran back to tell my parents what had just happened.

Our backyard, which bordered the beautifully landscaped gardens of the Godeny Istvan's estate, was on a slightly hilly spot from where we could see that every Jewish house was surrounded by armed Paramilitary Leventes. We saw the rooster-feathered gendarme with those long bayonets taking, first, the Rosinger family from the lumberyard and then Reichman Gusty with his family. Then Godeny Istvan came to our fence to say goodbye. He said, "Now it is you Jews, soon it will be our turn." He knew that the Russian front was advancing. They were afraid of that, for good reason. But we were hoping for it – for our salvation. My father took some money out of his pocket and I took my favorite Omega watch off my wrist and handed it over to him for safekeeping. First he said we should take it with us, that it might come in handy somewhere, but we said that we had no use for it right then and that we would get it back when we returned. He agreed, and, with a warm handshake, a "G-d bless you all", walked back to his estate.

A week later, when we were already in the ghetto in Nyiregyhaza, Godeny Istvan showed up to give back the money and my watch. We were terrified and told him – this could only get us into tremendous trouble because, by then, we were not allowed to have any money or valuables at all. But we did ask him to take us out for fieldwork. There was a rumor that this would keep us home. He said that, if it was possible, we would be the first ones. This was a little source of hope in these hopeless times.

It was already late in the afternoon when it was our turn. The gendarme and the Paramilitary Levente came to our house and said that we were arrested, but that we could take a change of clothing and some food. There was not much food in the house as Passover had hardly passed, and there was no time to bake bread, but my mother, early in the morning, started to bake cookies in the passover dishes. (There was no time or mood to change the dishes and we had a feeling that it just didn't matter anymore.) So we did pack whatever we could. The Gendarme rushing us, "hurry up", we had to leave. But first we had to gather the few chickens from the coop, my brother's bicycle, the jewelry, silverware and valuable from the house. Holding my poor 77 year old grandfather

from both sides because he, who was never sick in his life, all of a sudden completely fell apart. He just couldn't understand what was going on in this world around him. He just kept on saying that this was his home for 44 years and that noone could take it away from him.

So we started to walk towards the municipality where they took the chickens, the bicycle, the jewelry and the keys to our house and then marched us to the synagogue where most of the Jewish families had already gathered.

Stripped of our material wealth but mostly our human dignity, we had no choice. Slowly, the Shul and the Beit Hamidrash were filled with people. We all tried to figure out what our future holds. The young men and boys were already in forced labor camps, so we were left mostly women, the elderly and , of course, the children and babies. When there were no more Jews left in Balkany, they locked the gates on us and the armed Gendarme surrounded the Shul, watchinng that noone escape. The thought wouldn't even come up,there was nowhere to go – noone in Balkany would hide a Jew. It would only mean instant death.

Later someone told me to go to the fence – someone was looking for me. I heard sommeone calling Miss Berkovitz. I went and saw the maid of Mrs. Szenczy, the Protestant Clergyman's wife, waiting for me. She took a package out from under her large shawl and said "Mrs. Szenczy sent this to you, eat it in good health". I couldn't even say "thank you". A sound didn't come out of my throat. I felt only a big lump and was ready to cry. In the package were a dozen or two hardboiled eggs and a large half of homemade bread. This was the only case that someone sent something into the shul for anyone. She was the only one who dared. I'll never forget it and I am still grateful for it. I am only sorry that, in 1988, 44 years after the deportation, when we went back to Balkany for the first and last time, she was no longer alive. I am sure she is in heaven – she really deserves it.

By nightfall, all the Jews were crammed into the yard of the Shul. A long and bitter night was coming. The children were crying bitterly. Not only were they out of their homes and surroundings, but there was no place to put them down to sleep. The mothers were holding them in their laps , trying to comfort them. The old people couldn't understand either what was going on. We, the young people, stood all night. There was no room or place to sit down. We just wondered what would be next. How would this be solved? There were no answers. We never dreamt that it could get worse.

The next morning, long rows of horse-drawn carriages were lined up in the streets. The gendarme with bayonets and the paramilitary with their own weapons supervised filling the carriages with more and more people after which they also found room for themselves, to escort us.

After this was taken care of and the shul yard was completely empty, the horses began to move. It was the saddest, most heartbreaking journey I have seen. We had no idea where we were going. On the main street, I noticed that both sides of the street were lined with people. Curiosity and just witnessing the event were their motive. I didn't want to see anyone. With my head bent, my eyes closed and a very aching heart, I could hardly wait to leave Balkany.

Then, we were just watching to see which way we would turn, where we would go. In Nagykallo, on the road, we passed the old Jewish cemetery. The very last "ohel" is the great tsadik of Kallo's resting-place. I remembered that the song "szol a kakas mar" was authored by the great tsadik who made it famous.

Finally, we arrived at the ghetto of Nyiregyhaza. This was a very Jewish neighborhood. The Jews of Nyiregyhaza were not yet in ghettos. They were moved to other parts of the city to make room for the ghetto, where the Jews from the neighboring small towns and villages were brought in. They tried to squeeze in as many people as they could – five or six families onto one room. For instance, our family of 11 persons (with grandfather) got a corner of a room. On the floor we spread out sheets and blankets to make the best of the situation. For instance, Stern Iren and Niederman Laci found room under the piano. (They both survived the living hell and got married after the liberation.)

We stayed there for two weeks without any opportunity to get washed, or get undressed for the night. For food, they acquired a large cauldron to cook in and someone made soup every day. So at least people had warm soup once a day, plus the food we brought with us from home. The fence to the yard had to be locked at all times. You could leave the premises only with a permit. Our commanding officer was Stern Farkas, my all-time favorite teacher. I got a permit – I could come and go as I pleased on the territory of the ghetto. I was the official hair cutter, mostly for the children. We were worried about a lice epidemic, not having the opportunity to wash or bathe them.

We were so crowded. They kept on bringing more and more people from all over Szabolcs County. It looked liked the whole world was there. The Jews of Behar County were still home. My Uncle Berkovits Jeno lived there with his family. He was already in the "forced labor service", but his family sent us clothes, food and pillows which somewhat eased our situation. This lasted two weeks until we heard that they would be moving us somewhere else. Again, we thought, it couldn't be worse.

As I mentioned before, my father was a "protected person" because of his medals of heroism received during World War I. He decided to go to the chief magistrate of the administrative district of Nyiregyhaza, to talk to him about staying home for this good reason. The chief magistrate (Foszolgabiro) answered that the family is too big. Half can stay but the other half has to go. How can you choose? Who should stay or who should go? My father decided, come what may, we should stay together.

Again, the horse-drawn wagons lined up. Mothers with children, the old and helpless were put on them. We, the young ones, walked behind the caravan. I don't remember how long we marched, but we were happy to be outside, in the fresh air, even if we were followed by the gendarme with their bayonets on their shoulders.

Finally, we arrived at Nyiriespuszta. It was a tremendously large farm with lots of huge tobacco barns. That's where they put us up. With straw on the floor, it became our place to live. Our family of 11 got a spot about 2 x 3 meters – hardly room for everyone to stretch out. The barns were so huge that very many dozens of families were shoved in. These barns were also made for drying the tobacco leaves, so it was purposely made to be drafty and windy. Again, we had no opportunity to get washed or undressed for the night, no cooking facilities or even a public kitchen. We only had the food we brought from home or got in Nyiregyhaza. Once a friend came to visit and brought us two bags of food. Her name was Olga Steiner. Her young husband was already called into the Forced Labor Service. She managed the Perfumery they owned. This food we had for a family of 11. Later, in August, we met Olga Steiner in Auschwitz. We could hardly talk to each other but we know that neither Olga nor her husband Imre survived.

We from the ghetto of Nyiregyhaza were the first ones on the Puszta. I think all the Gendarme from all over Szabolcs District were there, in their rooster-feathered hats and their uniforms with their bayonets. It was so scary just to see them. They made us stand in a large square and listen to a gendarme sergeant. I am sorry that I don't remember that

good-for-nothing's name. He was standing on a high platform, barking, screaming with a foamy, dirty mouth that whoever tries not following orders or tries to hide Hungary's precious money or valuables would risk an immediate shot in the head or hanging. Peace and quiet should reign on the Puszta. The straw on the ground should be kept lined up straight and orderly, or else. All this would be under his control so better watch out. He barked like that for hours, with foam in his mouth and enjoyed his rule over "you filthy Jews". We were scared and helpless among such a crowd of gangsters. They all had their bayonets and weapons pointed at us and we were terrified. Yes, they came to inspect he straw that served as our bed at night and our seat most of the day. Of course they found fault everywhere and slapping faces was entertainment for them.

I wish I could remember that speech, only to write it down now, but all these decades I tried to forget it, not even to think of it.

A few days later we had to stand on the square once again. This time to watch and witness how they tortured to death poor Hershkovits Geza from Nyiregyhaza. He was the owner of the "Verbina Drogeria". Somebody reported him for some lie so they exiled him to Nyiries Puszta, before the Jews of Nyiregyhaza were put into the ghettos. Supposedly, he tried to escape which wouldn't surprise me because he was born and grew up around there and knew the territory. Besides, he was a daring, peace-loving individual. We really knew him well. He was the one who taught my father chemistry on Sundays, one summer. He enjoyed being with us. My mother grew up in Nyiregyhaza so they had lots to talk about.

In short, we knew him and we had to stand there and witness how a few of the gendarme beat him, stretched out on the ground. They kept kicking his face and head with their boots so that not one of his teeth remained in his mouth. His face became a bloody, raw, bleeding, swollen piece of meat. They, the Gendarme, just kept on kicking Geza until they got tired and left him on the ground for everybody to see what would happen to people who tried to escape. Together with my mother, I also dared to go near him and asked if he recognized us. He couldn't talk to answer, so my mother asked him to blink with his eyes once if the answer was yes and blink twice if no. By then, he had no strength left to blink, only a rattling sound came from his throat. They left him on the ground until his last breath left him. With bleeding hearts we said our good-byes to our good friend whom we loved and respected and looked up to. Sadly, he had to finish his young life under such circumstances, only because he was born a Jew.

Daily, more and more transports arrived at Nyiriespuszta from all over Szabolcs County. There were lots of relatives, friends and people we knew. But we could hardly talk to them – we had to be so quiet – we hardly dared to breathe, never mind utter a sound.

This again lasted two weeks. Again the rows and rows of horse-drawn wagons came to get us, to take us to the Nyiregyhaza railway station. There, on the tracks, long rows of cattle cars were waiting for us.

The Journey into the Unknown

That's where the real panic started. It was a horror to see how the soldiers and the gendarme treated the Jewish people.

Into every cattle car they pushed in 80 to 90 people, sometimes even more, where families wanted to stay together. Even this way, lots of families were torn apart. It was tragic for those children who were separated from parents and family and got into cars with strangers.

It took very long hours until almost every Jew was pushed in then they were out of wagons so those people who were left were pushed in here and there. The sick were carried on stretchers by their loved ones. No one could remain behind. Finally, they threw two pails into every wagon - one empty (to serve as a W.C.) and the other full of water. This had to last about four days for almost 100 persons. The Hungarian Gendarme, feeling they had done their job well, gave the over-stuffed wagons to the S.S. who had weapons up to their chin. The wagons were closed and locked from the outside. The long line of wagons slowly started to move. It was getting dark. The children were hungry and sleepy. The mothers put some small blankets or small jackets or whatever they had on the wooden floor to make those crying little ones as comfortable as possible. While the food lasted, it wasn't as bad, but when the food ran out, we couldn't bear looking at those hungry, thirsty, crying children. We, the big girls, stood leaning against the sides of the wagons, so that there would be more room for those who needed it more.

The empty pail was put into a corner and served as a W.C. When in use, two people would hold up a towel for privacy. Mostly the children used it. The grownups tried as much as possible not to go. We didn't eat or drink so we didn't need the W.C. The stench was terrible. My mother spoke German and tried to talk to the S.S. through the cracks, begging them to open a window-like opening that was there for this reason for the

horses and cows. Finally, they did and that was where we spilled the contents of the W.C. pail. After this was solved, my mother started begging again. This time for water, at least for the children. This time without success.

My father and Hillel Lichtenstein stood all four days and nights. They never sat down for a moment. They kept watching through the cracks where we were going or, rather, where they were taking us. While we were still in Hungarian territory we were still hoping they would let us stay in Hungary for any kind of work. But when we crossed the border, and were heading for Poland, we all knew that we had plenty of reason to worry. I was standing there near them, wanting to hear every word they said. But the noise inside and the noise of the locomotive made it very hard to hear. I felt that their always-encouraging attitude became very weak all of a sudden. They, too, felt helpless and hopeless and they couldn't cover it up any more. My father said to us "Children, no matter where you'll be, always volunteer for work." He said this even though he didn't see the big lie on top of the iron fence going into Auschwitz - "Arbeit Macht Frei". They were not even taken that way.

Auschwitz

Arriving to Auschwitz, the wagons stopped with a loud bang. They tore the doors open and, from the bright daylight, after the dark and dingy wagons, we could hardly open our eyes. We were glad to be in the open air and were hoping for the best. We had to leave everything in he wagons. They were yelling at us to get out quickly. The soldiers pushed out those who couldn't get out quickly enough. This is the very last time our family stood all together.

There was loud yelling everywhere – men to one side, women to the other. My father and my two brothers were supporting grandfather and all of a sudden disappeared in the crowd. Without one word of goodbye we were separated from them forever.

Then they were yelling that the young separate and mothers with children and the elderly should start walking. "Nothing to worry about", they said, "you'll see each other evenings."

Mother remained with four children and they were taken away so fast, also without a word of goodbye. We never even suspected that we would never, ever see them again.

And so it was that my sister Annie and I remained together. The S.S. soldiers lined us up. It had to be dead quiet and the selections began. We looked around and saw signs "Auschwitz" but had no idea what it meant. A very elegant S.S. officer appeared. His boots shined like a mirror. He sparkled from head to toe, with snow-white gloves and very elegant movements. He stood there and looked at us. I can just imagine what he saw after four days of travel in those wagons during which time we hardly ate, drank or slept and after a month of not having a chance to get washed. Only after a very long time did we find out that the elegant S.S. officer was Dr. Mengele.

One by one, we had to line up before him. He only looked at us and, without a word, pointed left or right with his white-gloved finger. We who went to the right were sentenced to work. The ones sent to the left had to follow the others with the old, the helpless and the mothers with children.

We heard we were going to Birkenau to have a bath. That was the best news we heard for a long time. We marched to the baths between two rows of barbed wire fences. It was a long walk and we were very tired, but happy to finally take a bath.

When we arrived, we had to strip completely naked under a bright, sunny sky. We had to throw our clothes into large piles and line up again for the barbers. These men were also Polish, Jewish prisoners in striped uniforms. With haircutting equipment, they cut our hair until our heads were completely bald as well as everywhere else there was hair. After this, we were disinfected and, finally, we got into the baths. It was a tremendously large hall where, on the ceiling, rows of showerheads were lined up. We all got a small piece of soap and then the water started to come out. It was over in less than five minutes. That was the extent of the bath we got.

There were no towels or anything to dry us, but we got a blue-gray striped "dress" – a straight sack. I was sure it was only for the night, but I was mistaken because that was our clothing for the 3 – 4 days in Auschwitz. In that we were marched back to Auschwitz to the barracks. By that time, it was pitch-dark and we just kept on going when, suddenly, I saw myself in a window pane. I thought my father was looking at me. With my bald head, I looked completely like my father. I tried to peek into every barrack we passed, looking for my family or just friends, but they were nowhere by then.

Finally, we stopped at a barrack that was empty, waiting for us. We were given over to these Slovakian women in striped uniforms who became our superiors. They lectured us on how lucky we were that we came now. They had already been there for many years, they said, and had built the lager in Auschwitz for us, with their blood and tears, with 40 degree fever, so we had better appreciate it. And with that, they let us inside. We saw that, on both sides, were built pritches "plank beds" in three layers. They were about two meters in length, two meters wide and the height was just to be able to sit up. Into every bed like this they pushed 10 people. We got three blankets. One we spread on the floor of the bed and the other two we used for covering five persons each. It was inhumane – only on our side could we make room for everyone. Luckily, we were all friends together. We were horribly tired – we only wanted to stretch out our legs and only wished to sleep. It was very noisy, a lot of people were fighting – they couldn't find room for all 10, especially those who were thrown in with strangers. The Slovakian girls, who were our superiors, were yelling and slaps on the faces were flying.

Finally, it started getting quiet and we only wanted to sleep when all of a sudden, from one of he beds, we heard loud screams. They wouldn't quiet down. The slaps and punches didn't help either. One poor woman kept on screaming – she completely went out of her mind. Our superiors couldn't handle the situation. They called in an SS soldier who, right there, on the spot, with one bullet, took care of this poor young woman's suffering. It was horrible to see this because it was a miracle that she was the only one and not all of us lost our minds.

Next morning, early wake-up – out of the barracks and line up in 5's. We made our row ith Roth Gaby and Sziszi, their aunt Julishka, Annie and me. This remained so almost until the end. This is when we got the first slice of so-called "bread". It looked and tasted like it was made of sawdust and it was hard as a rock. We had to cut it into 10 slices. I got the honor of doing it and this custom remained till the very end whenever we got bread. Everyone picked one slice and the last slice was mine. We never had any fights or even, god-forbid, misunderstandings. Lots of people fought even over one crumb.

We stood outside all day, under the open sky, in that only one striped "dress" on our body. It was early May and we were cold and shivering. By the afternoon, we heard that we'd be getting some soup. We could hardly wait for something warm – we were really hungry and thirsty. We couldn't hope for anything better. We each got an enameled plate or a mug with a piece of string that we had to carry on our waist. Finally, they

did bring in large containers of soup. We each got a ladle-full – no spoon or anything like that. We had to drink it from the plate. It was a green liquid with some green grass-like stuff swimming in it. We couldn't determine what it was made of. It reminded us of some kind of medication. Somehow we all decided it was Brom, which is what it smelled like. We were there for two more days and everyday we got the same soup. It was hard to swallow, but there was no alternative. Annie was fighting it, she didn't want to eat it, no matter how hungry she was. I tried to talk her and all the others around her, that if we want to go home alive we have to eat everything we get. Slowly we realized that, after the "soups" (since we didn't get anything else), no one got their monthly periods. We even thought it a blessing, since we couldn't take care of it. We had enough problems without it. We thought and talked among ourselves, who knows if we'll ever be able to have children, if we ever get home. It's true that many of us who were there never had any children. I know many. Some adopted, some didn't.

Three days after we arrived at Auschwitz, we heard that they'd be taking us somewhere to work. This was the best news we could hear – for workers they would have to give better food and treatment. Soon they did bring in some clothes and shoes, whatever they found in the cattle cars left behind by the poor deportees. Everyone got something and we exchanged things among us so that it would , more or less, fit. This is the way they took us back to the cattle cars, under circumstances similar to those when we arrive to Auschwitz, under S.S. guards' supervision.

Auschwits – Krakow-Plashow – Auschwitz

I don't remember how long the trip took, but I remember that when the doors of the cattle cars opened, we saw the signs of the railway station – KRAKOW-PLASHOW. As we arrived, we noticed that the Lager was built on the ground of the Jewish Cemetery. The way to every barrack and the huge Appelplatz were paved with Jewish gravestones. It was not an old cemetery, because the stones were dated quite recently, hardly a couple of years before.

Again we were put into a barrack with the same kind of "beds" we had in Auschwitz, but here we had straw on the floor of the "bed" and some blankets. Again, 10 people were put on every one of the "beds". Here our superiors were Polish-Jewish women. Our group consisted of all Hungarian Jews and it was very difficult to communicate with them. The language barrier was one reason. The second was much more painful – they were jealous of us because we were at home till now, while they wer

already in ghettos and lagers for some years and they established the lagers for us.

Evening came. We settled on the new pritches. We were happy with the straw on it and soon we fell asleep. We woke at night – something was biting us. We noticed that the straw was full of bedbugs, and the blankets full of lice. Not knowing what else to do, we got down on the floor and spent the night there. The next day we changed the straw and blankets, but we never, ever had a good night's sleep. Next morning we were put to work – we had to chop down trees in a forest. Ten of us had to carry a tremendously big tree on our shoulders. It was extremely heavy and we could hardly keep moving – we were collapsing under the weight – but there was no understanding or sympathy from anywhere. The SS with their many weapons and the huge German Shepherds at their fingertips were our guards and made sure that everyone was working hard. No one could have an easy moment. We looked around and were jealous of the Polish-Jewish girls who, as opposed to us, got washed in the latrines, combed their hair, used red crepe paper to brighten their lips and cheeks and that's how they went to work, outside the lager territory into the city. In the afternoon, the came back loaded with food – a piece of fruit, vegetable or bread hidden in their clothes, which they later sold for money. All this took place in the latrines. We just looked on in amazement, for we had no idea how to get near any money. They wouldn't involve us – we were just outsiders. Only a lot later did we find out that this was the "Schindler group".

Life in Plaszow continued, only our work became harder day by day. Our job was now building roads in the mountain and we young teenagers were chosen to do it. There were 14 – 15 year olds among us. With pick-axes in our hands, we worked from early morning till late at night with a half-hour lunch break. After we broke big, heavy pieces off the mountain, we had to carry them off the mountain in our arms. The SS soldiers with their big, wild dogs made sure we didn't start out with small pieces of stones. They would also check the latrines to see that no one was sitting there unnecessarily and, if they felt like it, they just instigated the dogs to bite as many people's legs as possible. The many legs bitten by their dogs were bandaged, and the girls had to work like that. Once we saw a large group of people arriving. The SS were leading them through the part of the lager where we were never allowed. They must have come from home because they were very well dressed families with children. That night, we heard constant shooting, and we never saw them again.

We arrived at Plaszow about the last week of May. By the end of July we heard that the Russian front was rapidly advancing toward Krakow and we heard the sound of cannons. Ten came a quick decision to leave the place. Loads and loads of wagons arrived. They pushed as many people as possible into every wagon. When everyone was inside, the wagons started to move and we heard that we were going back to Auschwitz.

Auschwitz Again

It was about August first when we arrived the second time in Auschwitz. Again, selections every single day. Again, the shivering that we remain together with Annie and, if possible, our friends, too.

We were lucky and we were sent to the right. Again, disinfection, bath and then came the tattoo on our left arm. My number is A-18221, my siste's is A-18222 (the A stands for Auschwitz).

From then on, these were our names. When in a roll call, we had to listen for our numbers – our names didn't count anymore. We had no names. Both of us still have the numbers on our arms, to this day. Lots of survivors got rid of it as soon as they had a chance.

Again, the daily, naked selections by Dr. Mengele. They did send large groups of people to work in the fields, factories or wherever. Everyone was happy to leave Auschwitz.

A couple of weeks later, they said we were going to take a bath. Again we were happy and started marching to Birkenau.

The baths belonged to the gas chambers. We could use them only when it was not being used. Standing and waiting for a long time, we were used to standing naked under the open sky. We had to leave our clothes in a pile, hoping to get something better after the bath. In the meantime, it got dark. They squeezed us into an empty barrack – not even pritches were inside. We were so crowded – hardly even standing room. Even though it was the middle of August, the night were so cold that we were freezing and shivering. Stark naked, Annie and I clung to each other and our friends to keep ourselves warm. After a bitter, long night, morning came, but they didn't open the gate.

We were hungry and thirsty and waiting for someone to come to us, but no one came. It was probably late afternoon when the gates opened and a barrel of water waited under strict supervision of the armed soldiers. We

all got a ladle of water and a pair of men's pajamas, whatever they found at their fingertips. That's the way they sent us back to our old barrack – nothing came of the bath.

48 years after liberation, we were in Israel already, it was Holocaust Remembrance Day, official mourning, no regular programs on the TV, only remembrance of the holocaust. All of a sudden, a woman started to talk about her experiences in Auschwitz and told about how long she was in Auschwitz, working outside the camp , in the city, in an ammunition factory. One day, in 1944, in the middle of August, going back to the camp after work, she smuggled in some ammunition and gave it to the men who worked in the gas chambers. They succeeded in blowing up a part of the crematorium so that days went by until it was in use again. This way they saved many, innocent people's lives. This story really mixed me up. The date was exactly the same. Looks like this was the day we were waiting naked for 24 hours to get into the baths. These showers were constructed to serve both, either gas or just water, as they wished. To this day, I don't know what would have been our fate had we gotten into those showers.

The selections went on daily. We didn't even mind that we were not sent to work, as long as the five of us were together.

On a nice day, in the very last days of August, a delegation from a factory came. They themselves did the selections. They were looking for young people with good eyes and nice hands. Luckily, the five of us were all picked and remained together. Five hundred Hungarian women were selected and separated, immediately, from the others. Next morning, they took us for a shower and got us some clothes and shoes that they found in the wagons. We happily exchanged them amongst ourselves, so that they, more or less, fitted us and we didn't look like clowns in the circus.

Again, into the wagons. The guards were just looking at us and we were scared. Annie was pretty even there, bald, so I ordered her to go to the back and stoop down so they wouldn't see her. I don't think this was even necessary, because the soldiers had strict orders not to go near a dirty Jew. I don't remember how long this journey took, but when the doors opened, we saw that the station was "Neustadt".

<u>Neustadt – Obersilesia – S. Frankel</u>

When we saw where we were, we found out that this city belonged to Obersilesia. It was already the very end of August. We suffered a complete month in Auschwitz. We never went back there again.

They put us up in a building that used to be a boys' dormitory. Before we arrived, it housed U.S. prisoners of war. There were narrow bunk beds, four in a group. We all got separate beds. This was the first time since we were taken from home that we slept in a bed alone. We got the top four beds with Gaby and Sziszi. Aunt Julishka was on a lower one. There were straw sacks which we had to keep straight at all times and two clean blankets for every person.

In a huge room, there were about 25 such groups of beds. Next to us was a big bathroom, a row of toilets, and in another room, a row of water faucets. True that it had cold water only, still , we felt like we were in heaven.

SS soldiers were our guards – two women and I don't remember how many men. They didn't live in the building. At 10 o'clock in the evening, they locked us in and came in the morning to wake us. But there were guards at the entrances a t all times.

The first ten days we were in quarantine. We were not allowed in the factory but we could dig trenches for the SS, so that they would be safe in case of air raids. There were plenty of air raids in the area. At those times, the SS had the trenches we dug for them and we were lined up under the open sky to witness the falling bombs, not far away from us.

After the 10 days, we were allowed in the factory where they weaved mostly materials for parachutes for the German War Machine. Before we were allowed in, somebody explained that the German civilian workers would stay one week and teach us how to work the machines and how to produce the maximum. Because whoever did not produce enough, that would be considered sabotage, punishable by death. The German civilian workers would be there to teach us. We were not allowed to converse with them except as relating to the work. We could only ask questions that were work-related. We could not accept anything or ask for anything from our "teachers".

The SS were constantly everywhere – just watching that everyone was working and that no one stopped, even for a minute. Every entrance had a couple of SS guards to make sure that no one tried to escape. The factory was "S. Frankel" - we could see the signs everywhere, carved into

every tool, stamped into everything. We knew it was owned by Jews, before they took them away and confiscated the factory.

The second week in the factory, we were already on our own with one, two, three or even four machines to work on, from the beginning. I got a very complicated damask fabric to make, so I only got two machines. If the thread broke, which happen very often, and I didn't notice right away, an ugly damage remained in the fabric. I had to stop the machine and take out the damaged part. The design was located high above the machine which had to be pulled back to match the print so the damask would be perfect. One machine in front of me, the other behind me, I had to keep my eyes on them constantly. I would turn around all the time to make sure everything went smoothly, because the thread broke very often.

We worked in three 8 hour shifts. Every week we had different hours. When we got back to our location, the SS always found something for us to do. There were small landowners or private houses with large gardens who asked for workers. We didn't mind it at all and were ready after 8 hours of work to continue to work out on the fields (not that we had a choice). The SS got paid for this and we were glad to be out in the fresh air (we could eat some fresh vegetables, sometimes even a fruit) even though the food we got was considerably better than Krakow or Auschwitz. The women working in the kitchen were from among us, so they cooked tasty soups, mostly from cabbage and potatoes. We were very satisfied with them. In the morning, we got coffee and one slice of bread, supper the same. Going to work, the SS guards watched us, walking with us all the way. It was a long walk. They took us around the city, through fields and gardens. We never saw the city and I don't remember ever seeing anyone around. We went back the same way. We were very satisfied with everything and only wished to stay there until the end of the war.

One day, after work, amid loud yelling, the whole group of 500 had to gather together. It happened that one of the SS women soldiers, in a routine check of the beds, found a toothbrush in one of the girls' beds. We were not allowed to have anything we didn't bring with us from Auschwitz, so she must have gotten it from someone in the factory. They interrogated the girl, cross-examined her, but she didn't talk. She wouldn't cause trouble for the one who gave it to her.

For this everyone was going to pay, the SS yelled with foaming mouth. Right away, they started with punishment exercises – quickly and

strongly – like soldiers, until one girl after another collapsed and fainted. They brought in pails of water to pour on the ones who fainted until they recovered. Only after the SS got tired, did they stop the sports. We all went to sleep crying.

The next morning we could hardly get up, our hands, arms and legs swollen and we could hardly walk. We just dragged ourselves to work. In the factory, the foreman noticed right away that something was wrong. The work didn't flow as usual. He was our boss and wanted to know what was going on. He practically interrogated us but we were afraid to talk, until someone did tell him what happened. This man was an exceptionally fine person – he was the one who selected us in Auschwitz. He had a crippled hand and we really liked him – he was fair and humane. He knew that we all did our best and was very satisfied with our work. He immediately spoke to the SS management and said that this should never happen again because we couldn't produce. He was responsible for the production and the delivery of the amount demanded of him. These tortures had to stop, never to be repeated. And that's the way it was – it never happened again.

We spent four and a half months in Neustadt. We worked very hard, under very strict conditions. Still, till this very day, I feel that without Neustadt, we would never have survived what was still awaiting us.

The Death March

January 19th, 1945, we woke to loud noise and yelling – "schnell, schnell, everybody dress quickly and we are leaving." From the kitchen, they gave everyone a whole 1 kilogram bread and we could take the blanket from our bed.

We heard whispering that the Russian front was rapidly advancing. Again, we were fleeing from the Russians rather the Germans were fleeing and they were dragging us with them. We didn't understand why they didn't leave us behind.

In a hurry, quickly, we were leaving, surrounded by the SS, chasing us on the roads. There we already saw that German civilians also crowded the roads, escaping with families, children and their belongings in cars, bicycles, large or small wagons, pulling in the snow.

They were free to go, well dressed for the cold winter weather, wherever they pleased. We, dressed in the one and only thin dress we had, with

one blanket over our shoulders, were surrounded by the SS, who were armed, chasing us. We held on to that one, small bread that we got. We had no idea where they were taking us or what their plans for us were.

At midday, we had a 15-minute rest. We could sit down somewhere on the side of the road and cut a slice of bread to eat. We had no idea how long that bread had to last us or when we would get something to eat again.

We started to walk again. We marched like soldiers. The snow was constantly falling and we were very cold. By evening, we reached a farm. The SS arranged that we be let into the barns. That's how it was – the cows and sheep shared their space with us. They were all put off to one side and we to the other.

It was heavenly warm in there. We were frozen by then and rolled into the straw on the floor until we warmed up. Only then did we look for something to eat. There was nothing else but what the cows and sheep got to eat. We must have been starving because we took it away from the animals and ate. We kept saying to each other how delicious the raw turnip was and we gathered the leftovers and took it with us for the road.

The SS guards got rooms and freshly cooked supper and breakfast. We only shared the food with the cows and sheep. We started the next day in a rush, hurrying, fleeing like fugitives. This was the way it was, day after day. Mostly it was raining or snowing. We marched without a stop. At night, they tried to find us a place so that we wouldn't be standing on the road. We never had such good luck again to find a place like the barn.

Mouthousen

One night, we were let into a concentration camp where only men were housed. We could stand or sit on the ground, under the open sky. We could only see the men from far away, behind a wire fence. They looked like walking skeletons, their striped uniform hanging on them like clothes on a scarecrow. We didn't see ourselves, but then, we were not yet skeletons. The fact that hadn't eaten for many days, didn't matter. Finally, they took pity on us, and we got some coffee-colored water early in the morning before we started out again.

The snow kept on falling. It was cold and we were very hungry. We could hardly keep up with the soldiers. Our shoes were already in shreds, they were soaking wet. Came the daily lunchtime break, we had nothing

to eat anyway, so I tore strips of our blankets and kept on wrapping them around the shoes, just to keep them from falling off. I did this for us and for everyone around us until it was time to go on.

Some of the girls sat down on the snow and were unable to get up and continue. The SS killed them with one bullet and we had to throw the bodies off to the side of the road onto the snow banks. We could hardly drag ourselves to go on. On the side of the road, on the clean, pure snow, we saw more and more bleeding bodies. From their clothing and very short hair we knew that they were from the previous transports.

After seeing this, if any of the girls complained or didn't want to go, I could only give them strength by telling them: "Can you imagine how our parents will feel when they get home and we don't get back?" We didn't doubt for a moment that out parents would get home. This usually helped and we kept dragging ourselves on.

One evening, the stopover was again a lager, Gross Rosen. For a change, this was a women's lager. By some miracle, Gaby and Sziszi found a cousin of theirs from NagyKallo, Fogel Ibi. We knew her from chilhood – she came to Balkan often. She was a very pretty blond girl, but no sign of her beauty remained. She was 20 years old, but looked like an old lady. She was left all alone and was happy to join us. Aunt Julishka was her aunt too, and now we were already six together.

We got a break from marching and stayed there for two days before we started out again. Still, we could hardly keep up with the guards. Our strength was rapidly waning when we heard that they acquired some wagons for us. Even though they were open wagons, it was still better than marching, we kept telling each other.

We were glad to climb into the open wagons. We thought ourselves lucky to find room near the side of the wagon – it would be good support for our backs, we said. That's the way it was until it started to rain and, from the side of the wagon, even more rain poured down our backs. Then the snow fell in large flakes until we were completely covered with snow.

Soon night fell, the nights are very cold in the middle of February in Austria, and our wet clothes froze on us. Daytime, the sun came out, the ice melted and we were soaking wet. At night, it froze again. This is what went on, day in and day out. Mornings, they threw the dead bodies out of the wagons.

One day, our stopover was in front of a men's lager. We were terrified to see the hundreds or rather thousands of corpses piled up in their striped uniforms, like logs of wood put away for the winter, five lengthwise and five across, piled up high, so many of them. I dared to go near, looked at the faces, relieved that I didn't recognize any and soon we were leaving anyway.

For a change, we got good news. We were getting closed, covered wagons. It was true – we really got them – normal passenger cars, old, worn but we felt like kings in a coach.

So many of us were pushed in that there was hardly standing room, but we were happy that our rags would dry on us and we wouldn't feel cold anymore. They even said we might get something to eat.

The train started to move. We could hardly find standing room for our feet. As the train gained speed, we fell all over each other. I looked around to see if there was any solution. I noticed that, high up, near the ceiling, there was a narrow shelf for packages, made out of fishermen's net. It was very inviting, but how was I to climb up there? Luckily, I was so skinny, I couldn't have weighed more than 25 kilos. I didn't think too long and succeeded in climbing up. It was so narrow that I could only lay on my side, holding on tight so that I wouldn't fall. I could stretch my legs. We all fell asleep – standing, some sitting and me on the package rack.

The train was rattling and we were traveling in the dark night. All of a sudden, there were horrifying explosions, lots of noise and the train came to a screeching halt. Our train had been bombed, right in the middle. There were lots of casualties, sadly many of us died there. Luckily, the train was very long - nothing happened to those of us who were at the end of the train – I didn't even fall off of the package rack.

In the morning, as it was getting light out, we saw the sign that told us we were in "Hannover". The city was in ruins and we were in the middle of it. For many days, we just stood there and waited for hem to clear the ruins so that we could move on. Our SS guards apparently couldn't get near us and for many days we didn't even see them.

In the big commotion, a few of us escaped. They knew the language perfectly and knew the territory, so they gave it a chance. I still think about them – who knows what was their fate? Did they succeed or were they caught and killed? Among them were the two lady doctors who

were with us in Neustadt. I was jealous and admired their courage. We were six girls together. You could not escape and hide in groups and we didn't have the physical or spiritual strength to do it. It would have been a tremendous risk.

I don't remember how long we traveled again and how much we marched until we reached Bergen-Belsen. That I still see before my eyes, when the SS guards transferred us over to the SS in Bergen-Belsen.

Bergen-Belsen

I think it was March 1st, 1945. We thought and hoped that we would have a place to put our heads down and a chance to rest up. Sadly, we were bitterly disappointed. The scene that caught our eyes can never be forgotten. All those walking, rather dragging themselves, half-dead skeletons, trying to reach the latrines but never succeeding because the horrible diarrhea caught up with them half way. The stink and stench even outdoors was so terribly nauseating that we tried not to breath and not to smell the choking stench of the corpses lying around. Hell couldn't be worse.

Then we were chased into a barrack, onto a pritch, as many as possible. In the barrack, everyone was horribly sick, starved and in misery. They didn't have the strength to move or even think of going to the latrines. In their feverish, nightmarish hallucinations, they just moaned, whined and wailed. Not being able to go to the latrines, they were in a bed of filth. They didn't even know what was going on around them.

The stench was a horror that was impossible to bear. I decided, no matter what, we would go from there, anywhere, just to be outside.

For the night, there was no alternative. We had to be there, inside. No one was allowed to be outside the barracks. But as soon as we could, in the morning, we escaped the barracks and just walked around as much as we could. Not that the outside air was very good, but this was the best we could get.

Every morning, they took the dead out of the barracks. I was curious to see where they were taking the corpses, so one day, we followed them. We had already seen enough horror in the past year but this was something shocking. Like huge craters, such tremendous mass graves, already almost full of corpses, but there were some still moving and moaning. They poured lime over them. By then we knew there was a

horrible typhoid epidemic. In the meantime, they were feverishly digging more and more graves. They couldn't work as fast as the graves were being filled. Around us, people were falling like flies. Every day, there were less and less of the ones we knew. We would put the corpses out in big piles until they came with wagons to take them away. The piles became bigger and bigger by the day. It became harder to handle. The big, giant graves were filling up one after the other. They couldn't dig new ones fast enough.

Then they announced that whoever was sick could go to the "Revier". We already knew that, under the SS, Jews were not allowed to be sick, so we decided never to go there. This decision lasted until Sziszi got very sick and the poor girl was convinced that it would be better there, we'd get some food and surely every one would have a bed. With such hopes, the girls kept trying to convince me to go until they succeeded and all six of us started walking towards the "Revier". This was a separate building for the sick only. We lined up to get in. In the meantime, I sneaked in to look around. On the right , there was a tremendous, big hall without any beds or anything. The sick were on the floor, on top of each other, piled up high, whimpering and rotting in filth and stink. It was a horrible sight. I asked the girls to take one look. They all looked in and, without a word, we all started back to our stinky, filthy barrack.

We hardly ever got a slice of bread or any kind of soup. Our strength was rapidly disappearing and we were just dragging ourselves. I noticed that our little group was starting to resemble skeletons. The situation was desperate. I, the eternal optimist, started to give up hope.

Suddenly, someone came into our barrack and yelled that anyone who could, should report for work. We had to leave right away. I jumped up and said, "if you can or can't, we are all going together, anywhere away from here."

They gathered a small group and we were on our way. A couple of SS women accompanied us. We marched, in the territory of the lager, when suddenly, they pulled us to the side of the road. We had to make room for another group to pass. Of course, we watched the faces – very well dressed families with little children and older people. We were amazed that we could see such things – people in their own, well tailored clothes. All of a sudden, we recognized my 15 year-old cousin Gitta and her Aunt Klara who were carrying her 3 year-old little girl Kati and holding, by the hand, her 6 year-old Agi. I screamed: "Klari! Gita!" and jumped to hug and kiss them. We could hardly exchange a few words. The SS were

there, separating us. They were on the move and so were we. We only later found out that their group was supposed to go to Switzerland, but somehow ended up in Bergen-Belsen were they were kept separate in a family lager. This was the Kastner group. Even this way, they were a lot better off than we were. They lived and remained together. Klari is going to have her 90th birthday in August 2001. Many long years later, we met them again and have been seeing them weekly, ever since. Those two children are both grandmothers and Klari is still a very good-looking great-grandmother.

Back to Bergen-Belsen. After that meeting, we continued, on our way to work, where, on a small lot, they planted some turnips and we had to dig them out. In the midday recess, we were allowed to eat from the turnips and, without washing them, dirty as they were, we ate them happily.

I was near a wire fence and noticed that, on the other side of the fence, a small group of men prisoners arrived. Their striped uniform was loosely hanging on them – they were only skin and bones. I asked them where they came from. They answered that they came from the Copper Mines in Bor. "Is Elbogen Soli with you?" I asked. "No, not here. We are all that remained alive", they said. Annie and I cried, believing that he was not alive either.

In the meantime, I threw some turnips to them, over the fence. They started to fight over them and became too noisy and the SS woman soldier came straight over to me and, without a word, kept on slapping my face. I didn't mind the slaps as long as those unfortunates got some turnips.

It only happened once more that we went to work in Bergen-Belsen. We hardly ever got anything to eat. We didn't even feel the hunger anymore, but the extreme weakness. We crawled to the SS kitchen's garbage heap to search for some potato peel or carrot peel or just anything. Annie didn't want to eat it but I explained to her that it didn't matter what was in our stomach as long as there was something in it. It was hard to convince her to swallow the dirty, discarded remnants.

Thinking about it today, I, myself, can hardly believe it, but the hunger so cruelly tortured us and the will to live was so strong. If only for that one reason – to be able to see our parents again. We couldn't believe that they weren't being kept in a family lager somewhere, together.

There were times we started to walk and search for grass growing on the ground. That was easier to swallow than the garbage from the SS kitchen. Water was only a dream, something that came up from the ground in small marshy, swamp-like puddles. With their stomachs on the ground, the girls tried to sip some moisture. I was very much against it. I knew it was dangerous, but thirst is in a way much worse than hunger and, somehow, it came to the point that we felt that it didn't matter any more. Annie says that when I bent down to wet my lips, they all knew that it was the end.

If anyone had told me that people can live without food and water for long months, I would never have believed it. We started out from Neustadt on January 19th. Now it was the beginning of April and during all this time, we hardly ever got a bite of bread. During the last few weeks, we ate nothing at all except for the things we found in the garbage.

The weather was getting better. The sun shined during the day, but the nights were freezing cold. The typhoid epidemic was raging. We all suffered horribly. The diarrhea tortured us. To this day, I don't understand how it was possible to overcome this without any medical help. Starving bitterly, we survived.

Not all of us survived. Poor Sziszi and Ibi, and Aunt Julishka just couldn't fight it any longer. I only know that, from our little group, Annie and Gaby remained with me, to this day.

Only then did I realize that we were also walking skeletons, but were still walking to the SS garbage to find something, or grass on the way. For long weeks, this was our only food.

In the lager, the SS terror completely stopped. They just didn't bother with us anymore. Men came to carry out the corpses and drag them to the mass graves. We couldn't even think anymore. I only begged god that we may not find our end this way.

We saw the white flag on the tower, but it did not register. It didn't mean anything.

The Liberation

April 15, 1945. Somebody gave a loud yell – Look, the British soldiers are coming! I really saw the tanks nearing and loudspeakers asking us

not to worry. "Relax, you are free. It's the end of your sufferings." This much I understood with my little knowledge of English. With happy outbursts from the skeletons, they started to sing and dance. All my strength left me and I burst out crying which I couldn't stop for many days.

The tanks stopped and the soldiers got off. They just looked around. They had never seen anything like it before. The many, sick, diarrhea stricken skeletons had nowhere to hide. They sat down anywhere to relieve themselves. The many British soldiers didn't bother them. They couldn't even understand that it was over, that we were finally free. The soldiers couldn't believe their eyes – they cried like little children. Not only the young ones, but the older ones who, during the long war years had surely seen much suffering, just stood with their feet on the ground, as if they grew roots, turned away from the horrible sights and loudly and shamelessly cried.

They saw the mountain-high pile of corpses and the walking skeletons, some of which could only walk on all four, they could hardly drag themselves but, with their last breath wanted to see our liberators. April 15, exactly one year to the day, that we were dragged from our homes so forcefully and inhumanely.

The British soldiers' first job was to set up a field kitchen. They cooked rice with big pieces of fat meat. Right away, they started to give it out. Lots of people sat down and filled themselves with food. Annie and I just tasted it but not one bite went down our throats. We just could not eat that heavy, fat food. Later, we found out that this was our luck because, those who did eat, couldn't get up. They remained there forever. Those dried out stomachs couldn't handle the food. I dreamed only of a boiled potato and for weeks after I did not eat anything else but a boiled potato, daily, even though there was lots of good food all around.

The SS soldiers disappeared. Those very few that were caught were put to work by the British. It was good to see these "high and mighty" now pulling the corpses out of the barracks to the common graves. They also cleaned the barracks without complaints.

In the meantime, the British liberators put up a field hospital. They first admitted the very sick. Annie was among the first to get in. I was happy to see that she was under British Army doctors' care. I myself didn't complain – there were lots of people who were in much worse shape than me. I went to see Annie daily and would sit there for hours, trying to

comfort her and all the other around. We, the "healthy" ones, were taken from the dirt and filth, full of lice and all kinds of infections and sickness, to the former SS quarters where clean beds with sheets were waiting for us. We couldn't believe that such things existed there.

One day, Annie was waiting for me and crying. She said that she could have gone to Sweden but she didn't want to go because I wasn't there. "Never mind," I said, "you will sign up today. You have to go, the sooner the better, and I will follow. Sweden will be good for you. I remember reading somewhere that there is lots of dairy food and the climate is very good. Surely we will get healthy again." With this I quickly got into a bed, where somebody just died, because I wanted to stay with Annie by all means. In the afternoon, the nurses came to take my temperature. I had 37.8. After the doctor's visit, I looked at my chart, which said T.B. Pleorisy and Scabies. I immediately scratched the scabies off my chart. I didn't have high fever, but a constant, low grade fever. Of course, they put me on the following transport to Sweden. They comforted me in that I would see my sister there. Annie's left the next day and I followed a week later.

Annie told me that she cried the whole time because they didn't believe her when she said she had a sister who would follow her. Until my first letter arrived, they thought it was sheer fantasy, like most other cases. Annie spent six months in a T.B. sanatorium while I was in a convalescent home. We constantly corresponded until we were reunited.

From Bergen-Belsen, we were taken to Lubeck and from there, on small hospital ships to Sweden. On the ships, there were narrow bunk beds. I got one on top. At night, I woke up feeling very thirsty and wanted to go to the lavatory. As I was getting off, I fell off the bed onto the floor. When I awoke, I saw all the doctors and nurses of the ship standing around me. I was burning with fever --it was so high that the thermometer couldn't register it. They put me back in bed. I was unconscious for 24 hours but, when I woke up, the fever was down completely. When getting off the ship, I walked on my own two feet and was ready to eat some of the good food they offered. My appetite was still not the best but I was, slowly, getting back to myself. Four months after the liberation, I was still 36 kilogram.

From the ship, they took us to Goteborg, where we were put into a ten day quarantine in an old hospital that they had emptied for us. In those ten days, no one was allowed to leave the hospital. We were under strict doctors' care and they performed all kinds of examinations, x-rays, etc.

After the ten days, I was considered healthy and, the next Sunday, the group of healthy ones was taken on a boat ride around the city, to introduce us to the beauty of Goteborg. I was among the group and enjoyed it, too. After a couple of months, I was sent to a convalescent home near the city. Annie was recuperating too and after six months she joined me in the convalescent home. They took us for checkups, lung x-rays, blood tests, etc. But we felt fine. The Swedes took good care of us – we even got five or ten krones for pocket money, weekly. This amount was not enough for those who smoked but we saved it and bought some fabric with which I made a dress. Everybody liked it so much that they wanted me to sew for them, too. That's how my dressmaking career started in Sweden.

After we were released from the convalescent home, we got to know a Swedish, Jewish family. Through them, we found a very old, very small apartment for very cheap rent. We decided to take the place in partnership with two sisters we knew. The older sister knew how to sew. Together, we just sat down and started to work. Annie and the other girl found work in a coat factory that happened to be on our street. The four of us lived there until we left Sweden. I can't say that this arrangement was perfect, but we managed.

We were independent and we had to make due with whatever we had. We had no help from anywhere but we knew that this was only temporary and did our best. We were waiting for news from home but the war had hardly ended and not even mail got through, let alone trains or airplane connections. We were still hoping that the family got home.

One day, a very sad letter arrived. It was addressed to: Berkovits Olga and Anna, Sweden. That's all. We were surprised that it arrived at all. It came through the Red Cross. Our Uncle Jeno sent it. He found our names on the list of the Bergen-Belsen survivors and it said that we were taken to Sweden.

Uncle Jeno wrote that no one came back, out of the whole, beautiful family. He himself, his son Miki and daughter Gitta survived. His wife, my Aunt Ada and their younger daughter Edike were victims of Auschwitz. Their home-coming was a very bitter pill to swallow. The house was empty and the beautiful Perfumery store was robbed and completely emptied. They lived in Derecske but couldn't bear to live there any more and moved to Debrecen. He decided to take a trip to Balkany hopefully to find someone or something. Very sadly, the situation was the same. He received the same "nice" welcome.

Our Drugeria, the whole house including grandfather's apartment were completely empty. Even the doors and windows were taken out before they burned the rest of it. He spoke to our neighbor Godeny Istvan who said that the Russians took my watch and money.

My uncle, in a very sad mood, went back to Debrecen and wrote to us that, right now, we shouldn't go anywhere, definitely not back to Balkany or Hungary. We'll all meet in Israel.

Before we received this letter from my uncle, I wrote to the Jewish Community in Balkany. I had no idea whether anyone would be there to answer. It took a very long time but an answer came from Hillel Lichtenstein. He gave a detailed report of the situation in Balkany. I saved this letter and have it to this day. Only after receiving this letter did we understand what really happened and that we had to give up hope of our family returning. The letter, which so heart-wrenchingly describes the situation and the survivors' mental state, is included at the end of my writing. To this day, whenever I read this letter, I have a good cry, even though I know it by heart.

Reb. Hillel's sister and her husband Rav Klein and their family were in the States already and sent us affidavits to go settle there. By then, Annie was engaged to Gyuri and decided not to go to the States but straight to Israel. I told them that I always wanted to see America and that now that I had an opportunity, I would take it. Annie and Gyuri got married in December 1948 and left to Israel on their honeymoon. I told them that I would soon follow. I was sure it would be easier to go from the States to Israel than from Israel to the States.

That's the way it was. I did follow them, even if it took almost 40 years, but we live here now. We did come to visit as often as we could and were constantly in touch by correspondence.

After my arrival to the States, by chance or somewhat of a miracle, I met Elbogen Soli who we had given up for dead and cried over, with Annie, after a false statement. Finally, he did return from Bor. Bitterly, he survived the withdrawal from Cservenka. After the liberation, as soon as he could, he got to the States to his 70-year-old mother, two sisters and two brothers who were waiting for him.

He had already been there one year before I arrived. He was working and already spoke English. Of course, he started to show me Manhattan and

places of amusement, all of which were pretty and new to me. After work, he picked me up and we wandered around the big city. It was exciting and we never had a dull moment. Soli knew my parents and grandfather. I didn't have to introduce myself. He knew where I came from. His family embraced me with such love. They knew my family. It was so relaxing and comfortable for me. I felt safe. They gave me back the confidence, the sense of security, that I lacked those last few years. There was someone to take over. Not every decision had to be mine. Soli's family had a great part in this. They were wonderful people, one by one. They took every responsibility off my shoulders and I felt as though the entire world was mine.

After a short few months, we decided to get married. It was so natural and I felt so sure about it. He made me extremely happy. Even today, I see how right we were then because, after 52 years of marriage, I feel the same way.

I felt very much at home in America. The language came very easily and quickly. The fact that I previously knew some English, only helped. We worked hard, gladly and happily, for there were good reasons – we were establishing a family. We raised three wonderful children, sent them to the best private schools around, from elementary through high school. This was the fruit of our hard work and determination. All three of our children got into city universities. Then we waited for retirement so that we could move to Israel. We missed Annie and her family, even though we were constantly corresponding and visited every chance we got.

Annie and Gyuri have two wonderful children and five grandchildren. (We have six.) Their children and ours not only get along but, there is a deep love between them. For this I am really grateful.

We are in very close contact with the few cousins we have left. We meet weekly and whenever possible. With our grandchildren, we are a big family again. We can't make up for those whose fate so cruelly tore them away from us and, that our children grew up without grandparents is forever painful.

We miss you all and will never forget.

Afterthoughts

By Gyuri Feuerstein

As time goes by, its funny, but the pain doesn't diminish, the sore does not heal, remembering is painful, it tears you apart. As time goes by, the way the number of those of us who were there, lived through it, witnessed it, for us who remained, three quarters of our life is "since". Our time is divided into two parts – "before" and "since" because, for those of us who were there, the Holocaust cut our lives in two. Therefore, there is no day that the memory is not brought up. In any conversation, sooner or later, we are back to the "before". And for those who were not there, as time goes by, the stories become less and less believable. This is the reason that it is so important that, those who are able, bear witness to what happened there.

These writings usually have a fault – not everyone has the ability to put it into words. People remember the torturous pain of starvation but don't feel that they can relay it to the reader. One thinks that what one wanted to say become flat nothings. Some of the writers try to overcompensate by over-dramatizing or exaggerating.

When I started preparing my sister-in-law, Olga's, writings for the press, mostly the simplicity in telling, the objective portrayal of events, the lack of sentimentality, the lack of self-pity and, with all this, the brave sincerity touched me.

For me, as an editor, there was nothing more to do than to correct some word order here and there or clarify some text.

Olga, without any sensationalism, is able to write about the Lagers and the many months of gray horror there spent so that, in every sentence, for those who were there, the transfer of the suffering comes to the surface and those who were not there may better understand what really happened in the twentieth century, in the middle of Europe.

Every such writing is a gravestone for those we remember and for those for whom no other memorial remains. At the same time, we have to remember those hundreds of thousands who didn't leave behind even one single survivor, those who are not even on any list of names, those who lived unknown and remain unknown in their death, but whose horrific death screams silently, blaming the deaf skies.

May the memory of all those be blessed.

Kiryat Motzkin, May 2001

The Families of Balkany

I'll try to remember the families in Balkany, in alphabetical order, hopng I don't forget anyone.

Aushpitz Ignatz and family lived next to our schoolyard. They were elderly people with many grown up children, most of them away from home. The younger ones were still at home. One of them was a very good dressmaker. I took a course by her. I was in their house everyday for about six months. Mr Aushpitz was a retired insurance agent, but the years I really remember were when he was busy taking care of his beautiful, big garden, where he grew vegetables and some beautiful flowers.
The younger girl was hardly older than me. She survived the holocaust and was sent from Bergen-Belsen to Sweden, to recuperate. She remained in Sweden where she got married and has a family of her own. Two older girls were living in Budapest. One married a Christian boy who, in the hard times, was not very helpful in saving her so, after the war, they divorced. She remarried, to a Jewish cousin. The parents and some adult children were lost in the holocaust.

Ayshpitz David and his wife were also elderly people. Some married children lived away from home. He was a barber with a barbershop of his own. I only heard the stories of how he used to pull teeth in the "olden days", in his barber chair, before there was a dentist in Balkany. His wife was a good dressmaker. None of them survived Auschwitz.

Berkovitz Bernath – my grandfather.
Berkovitz Lajos and family. They are my family about whom I already wrote.

Mrs. Balkayi Gyulane, a widow, mother of the only pharmacist. They were not taken into the ghetto before finding a replacement pharmacist to take over the drugstore in Balkany. It took a few weeks and they were home until they found out that the next day it was their turn. That night, the old lady took some poison and killed herself. Her son Kalman and daughter-in-law Margit were sent straight to the Auschwitz gas chambers. The old lady had one more son, Sandor, who lived with a Christian woman, Rozsi. The whole family officially signed over all property and a fortune of valuables to Rozsi for safekeeping. But she still didn't bother to hide Sandor. All the fortune and property remained in Rozsi's possession. None of them survived.

Berger Menyhert and family. He was a tailor, lived a nice, quiet life with their four children: Ibolya 14 years old, Magda 13, Josef 5 and Ferenc 1 year old.
None of them survived.

Csillag Herman and his wife. Their son Bela was arrested on Yom Kippur in 1942, in our synagogue. Noone ever heard about him ever again. Their daughter, Sari, married Dr. Berger in Derecske. Another son, Zoltan, married Niederman Erzsi. They had a little girl, Marika, beautiful like a doll. Lovely people, all of them. From all these people, not even one survived.

Csillag Beno and his wife were landowners. I only remember two sons - Dr. Csillag Erno and Jeno. Only Jeno survived. The rest of them were lost in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Czigler Adolf and his wife had a very small gricery store. They were already old people. Somebody reported to the police that Mrs. Czigler made some remark about Hitler. That is all that was needed and the poor old lady, who was probably about 80 years old, was arrested and deported to a concentration camp, months before everyone else in Balkany. Mr. Czigler was deported with the whole community. They both disappeared in Auschwitz.

Dolf Abraham and family. His wife, two sons and three daughters never came back. He was one of the "shohet"s and Mrs. Dolf took care of the ritual bath. One of the boys was called in to forced labor. He was sent with his unit to the Ukraine in the very early 1940's. He couldn't take the tortures and treatment and died there. It was a terribly sad day when his parents received his clothes.
From this family not even one survived.

Mrs. Deutsh Ignatzne, a widow, our very dear neighbor. Her oldest son, Zoli, left for Paris with a friend, Schnitzler Andor, to try their luck. They became raincoat manufacturers. Soon, daughter Helen followed, but when her father became very sick, Helen came back home to take care of her father. After he passed away, she went to Budapest to learn a trade making ladies' hats. Helen wanted to be with her mother for Passover – It was already April 1944. In Budapest, at the railway station, she was arrested. Jews were not allowed to travel anymore. She was taken to "Kistarcsa" concentration camp, in Hungary, from where they were taken straight to Auschwitz. They were stamped as political prisoners.

Another brother was in a forced labor camp. The youngest brother, Lajos, was the accountant and bookkeeper at the Talit Factory in Balkany.
Mrs. Deutsh and son Lajos were deported to Auschwitz when we were. Helen was working at the gas chambers where she sorted the clothes that people left behind, in piles, before going into the gas chambers. She found her brother's suit with his I.D. papers in it. What a horrible way to find out your loved ones fate. She knew that her mother was among them, too.
Brother Feri came back from forced labor. Zoli survived in Paris. Helen survived Auschwitz but her mother and brother were swallowed up by the gas chambers.

Desber Jeno and family. He was a maker of shoe's uppers. His wife and two children survived but he, Mr. Desberg, didn't come back. I think he was in a slave labor camp and didn't survive.

Elbogen Izidor and his wife Irenke dealt with feathers for their livelihood. With real, hard work, they finally acquired a small house of their own and got a cow to ensure plenty of milk for their five children. The oldest at the time of deportation was Adolf, 9 years old. The others were:
Edith – 8 years old
Laszlo – 7 years old
Margit – 5 years old
Sandor – 3 years old
My parent were the godfather and godmother for Laszlo. I remember that we chose his name. What a sweet, little boy he was, just like the others. We loved them all. What a shame that none of them survived.

Frankfurt Mor and his wife had at least six sons. From all of them, only one went to live in Nyiregyhaza. The rest stayed in Balkany, even after they got married and had their own families.
The oldest, Nandor, had a seltzer factory. Actually, that meant that he bottled carbonated water. I don't know how many children they had and how they were able to feed their large family from their meager income, but they never complained.
Sandor and family had a "sack for loan" business. Again, I don't know how many children they had but I know there were a few. One of them, a young teenager, Miriam, I met in Auschwitz and then again in Bergen-Belsen. They were the ones who moved to Nyiregyhaza.
Lipot and family had a small store where they sold ready-made blouses, underwear, stockings, etc. David was a young, married man who stayed in his parents' house and took over their business, selling paint. The

youngest Frankfurt boy escaped from Hungary and somehow wound up in Palestine before it became Israel. From all these Frankfurt families only David survived. There were at least 20 grandchildren, the grandparents and all the above-mentioned. None survived. They were all swallowed up in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Fried Dezso and his wife with their son Bandi and his wife and two children lived together in their very spacious house. They owned the "casino" where some people played cards and had a cup of coffee. It also served as the movie house once a week.
None of these six people survived.

Mrs. Fried Isidore had three sons and three daughters. The girls were excellent dressmakers. They could have competed with the best in Paris. What lovely people they were. The girls names were Szerena, Marishka and Bozsi.
All were victims of Auschwitz.

Fishman Elias, his wife had two boys – Lipot, 16 years old and Miklos, 14 years old. Mr. Fishman was a trader in land produce. Mrs. Fishman was a very lively, young and sweet person who acted as if she were our age and one of us teenagers. I just loved them all. The two boys happened to be in deportation in a lager with my brother-in-law who remembers them as two boys who took care of each other and were very close. Too bad none of the family survived the horrors of Hitler.

Fettman Mor married the owner of one of the bakeries, late in life. She had been a spinster but luckily he had a boy from a former marriage and they were happy together.
None of them survived.

Fleisher Jeno and his wife had three boys – Kalman, 17 years old, Karoly, 15 and Josef, 13 years old. Mr. Fleisher had a horse and wagon with which he made a living. He was very proud of the fact that in World War I he served as a sergeant in the Hungarian Army.
All five of them were swallowed up in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Grunberger Kalman, his wife and family.
He was a Hebrew teacher. I don't remember how many children they had, but I knew the bigger ones well. The oldest, Erzsike, was a very pretty and talented girl. She painted and drew pictures beautifully. In addition, she was a good dressmaker. The second child, Iren, was my age. We went to school together and were friends. Later, she also

learned to sew. The third girl, Gitta, was my sister's age. She had a very beautiful handwriting. They were all very artistic. Their fourth child was a boy named Valvie and then Miklos, Edith 16 and Erno 12.
From this beautiful, big family only Valvie survived. The rest were all victims of Hitler.

Gerle Jeno, his wife Eszti and their daughter Zsuzsa who was 8 years old at the time of the deportation. Jeno was the first and only dentist in Balkany. Somehow, he survived but his wife and daughter were sent to Auschwitz and never came back. They were swallowed up by the gas chambers.

Goldman Josef, his wife and their three children – Edith 7, Tamas 5 and Ervin 1 year old. Mr. Goldman manged theeir bottling of carbonated water business and lived quietly. He served in the forced labor system in Bor. He lived through the night of horror in Chervenka. I know – my husband was there too. He saw Josef – both his feet swollen like barrels from his thighs down to his toes. He never had a chance to survive.
His wife and children were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Gross Albert and family. I don't remember much about them. They were a young family and never had a chance to survive.

Hollander Herman and his wife were an old couple. They managed their small grocery store as long as they were allowed to. They were childless, lived alone. They happened to be by grandparents' closest friends. My father helped them with their bookkeeping and with their will. They wanted me to be one of their inheritors. They had a house in Nyiregyhaza with some rented apartments. They were a very sweet, old couple – always walking hand in hand. They talked about how neither of them wanted to remain alone. They wanted to die together. They did – in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Horovitz Ignac and his wife Piroska. Their only son was Josska was an electrician. Bothe men survived, but Mrs. Horovitz was deported to Auschwitz and was a victim of the gas chambers.

Horovitz Samuel and his wife had three daughters and a spinster Aunt Rozi who lived with them. Rozi took care of the store – fabric by the yard. She was the soul of the business, very well-liked by all. She was an authority – whatever she said was holy. She was smart and respected by everyone. Samuel himself dealt with horses – buying and selling.

The three girls survived, but Mr. and Mrs. Horovitz and Rozi were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Horovitz Josef, his wife Zsofi and their two children – a boy and a girl (I don't remember their names).
All these Horovitz's were brothers and Rozi was their sister. None of them survived Auschwitz.

Hochman Rudolf's widow and her daughter.
Gottlieb Malvin owned and operated a very nice, big store of fabric by the yard. Their children helped out in the business. The children survived, but Mrs. Hochman and Mrs. Gottlieb were victims of Auschwitz.

Heisz Adolf, his wife and two boys had a store for handwork. Of the four of them, only the wife survived. Three of them were victims of Hitler.

Heisz Isidor and his wife had four children. They had a printing shop. Of the six of them, only Isidor Survived. Five of them were swallowed up in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Heisz Menyhert Sroli was a single guy who served in a firced labor camp. He came back very sick. Somehow, he got to Israel, got married, but was so sick – he sat ina wheelchair until he passed away. I don't count him as a survivor but as a victim of Hitler.

Houser Jeno, his wife and four children also had a Jewish girl helper in the house. Mr. Houser was a glazier and worked hard for a living.
Of the seven of them, only he survived. Six of them were sent to the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Hauser Abraham and his wife had at least five children. The oldest, Malka, was married and had a child of her own. The others were Leicsu, Feigu, Jichah and Peszu and a younger one whose name I don't remember. From all these, only Leicu, Jichah and Peszu survived. The parent and about four children were sent to he Auschwitz gas chambers.

Jakabovits Vilmos, his wife and seven children lived on what Mr. Jakabovits earned as a shoemaker. They lived very modestly, but those children were sparkling clean and well behaved. One girl survived. The rest were victims of Hitler.

Klein Zoltan, his wife and two sons. The older boy was Bandi, my age. We went to school together. The younger boy was Gaby. Mr. Klein was the manager of the only small bank in Balkany. Of the four of them, only Bandi survived. Three of them were victims of Auschwitz.

Klein Shimon, his wife and three sons all worked in their shoemaking business. Only one son came back. The rest of them were victims of Auschwitz.

Mrs. Klein David, togetherr with Szeren and Terez, had a "bar", retailing in wine and spirits. I don't know much about them, only that everyone called Terez – "Tante". She had a son, a doctor, who didn't live in Balkany and only occasionally came to visit.
From this family, there were no survivors at all.

Szoke Klein and his wife had two boys and five girls. The men in the family dealt with horses. The girls were dressmakers.
From this nice, big family only two survived. 7 of them were victims of Hitler.

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Klein and family had a store of fabrics by the yard. They had a son, a Rabbi, and another one whose name, I think, was Itcig. The two younger ones were Moishe and Etu.
From this large family only Etu survived. All the rest were victims of Hitler.

Klein Samuel and his wife had a store of fabrics by the yard. Their daughter, Rozsika,got married and lived, with her husband and two little children, in her parents' house.
They were all victims – no survivors at all.

Klein Ignatz, his wife and two daughters were our neighbors and friends. The women operated the dairy plant. They bought the milk from the neighboring farms and from small-scale producers and they separated the cream from the milk to make cheese which they later sold to button factories in large quantities. Mr. Klein was the head of the accounting department in the Talit factory. The girls were our very close friends. Gitta, the older one, was one year older than me. Beilu was my sister Annie's very good friend. After the liberation, the two girls came back. They both got married but Beilu never really recuperated from the horrors of the lagers and very soon she passed away. I don't consider this surviving.
From the four of them, the parents and Beilu were victims of Hitler.

Klein Ferenc married Weisz Malika and had two adorable, little girls. Ferenc was soon called into the forced labor system and while there, his wife and two little ones were deported to Auschwitz and never came back.

Klein Kalman and his wife managed their "bar" until the permit was taken from them. Some years before, their only daughter left for the states. She was adopted by distant relatives. They liked her so much that a neighbor also wanted to adopt someone from Balkany. She wrote to us tat she had me in mind. I was about 15 years old at the time. My parents said that the decision had to be mine. I cried all night – couldn't bear the thought of leaving my family behind. In the morning I gave them my answer – I was not going.
Before the deportation, Mr. Klein was in Budapest and wanted to come home to Balkany, for Passover. But Jews were not allowed to travel anymore, so he got stuck in Budapest. Mrs. Klein found herself alone for the holiday, so we invited her to he Seder ights. She was deported with us, but did not survive.

Mr. and Mrs. Lefkovits Bezallel. He was the second and chazan ("cantor") in the congregation. We all enjoyed his beautiful voice through the high holy days and all year. Before the holy days, he used to come over to our house and listen to some of the Josele Rosenblatt records on the gramophone we all enjoyed. They had five children. Not even one survived from this family.

Lichtman Erno and his wife owned one of the lumberyards in Balkany. They had no children but were the lovliest couple around. They just enjoyed all their nieces and nephews. What a shame they didn't survive.

Lichtman Mor, his wife had two boys and three girls (Feri, Laci, Iren,Margit and Klari). Their house was on the most desirable spot, on the square, a corner turning into Adony Street where all the other Lichtman brothers lived. One of the boys served in the forced labor service in Bor, the other one also somewhere in a slave labor camp. From this beautiful, ig family not one single person came back. They were all victims of the holocaust.

Lichtman Jeno's widow and two daughters owned the house next to Erno's. Duci was the older girl, my age. We went to school together. Agi, the younger one, was the only survivor of all the Lichtman families.

Lichtman Beno and family was first in line – the biggest lot of all the Lichtmans and a tremendous big house. He was the oldest of the brothers. Idon't know much about them, only that they moved out to their farm and that there were no survivors.

Lichtblau Ignatz and his wife had three children. Sorry I don't know much about them. I only know that none of them survived.

Lieff Samuel and his wife had eight children. The oldest one was Magda, my age. We went to school together. Mr. Lieff was employed in the Talit Factory. From this nice, big family, there were only four survivors. The parents and four children were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Niederman Erno and his wife owned one of the flour mills in Balkany. Their daughter, Erzsi, married Czillag Zoli and had a beautiful little girl, Marika. The Niedermans also had a son, Laci, who was the only survivor of the whole family. He married Stern Iren, my dear teacher's daughter who came back, but she never got over the horrors of the lagers and died very young. So after all, she didn't survive either. They were all, except Laci, victims of the holocaust.

Mrs. Popper Ignatz lived alone in a very big house. She was a rich landowner's widow and was deported with all the Jews from Balkany to Auschwitz. She didn't survive.

Popper Armin, his wife and their four very handsome boys were the best tailors in Balkany and in the neighboring towns. "Uncle" Popper, we called him, was a very good-looking and charming person. He loved to come to our house. Sitting around the kitchen table with my father and a glass of tea in their hands, they could talk for many hours about their experiences in World War I. We children couldn't understand what there was to talk so much about a war. Only now do I understand. We can also talk many hours about our experiences in the Holocaust. But then, again, ours was not just a war, it was something else.
In the war years, work was scarce for tailors. People couldn't even think of making a new suit, but you had to eat. One of the Popper boys, Jani, went to Budapest to work. He was such a good child that he sent home, to his parents, part of his salary every single month, so that they shouldn't, G-d forbid, lack anything. Pista and Laci also joined their brother Jani in Budapest, to work together. Only Joska, the youngest, remained at home with his parents until he was called in to forced labor.

They were taken to the ghettos and to Auschwitz. From this beautiful family, only Joska asurvived. All the rest were victims of the holocaust.

Popper Samuel and family
Popper Jeno and family
Popper Farkas and family
Popper Ferenc

All these Poppers were brothers. They were business people. I don't remember much about them, but I know that not one single person came back. They were all victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Reinitz Menyhert and family.
Mr. Reinitz was in charge of the finance administration, in the municipality of the town, for very many years. He was held in high regard and respected by all. He was the only Jew to hold this or similar office, until the Hitler era, when they put him into pension. He was an orthodox Jew with a nicely trimmed beard, very dignified and handsome. Of all his children, most were married. Only the youngest four were still at home – one daughter and three sons, all of whom were in and out of forced labor or slave labor. These people were our neighbors and friends. I knew them very well. From all these wonderful people, only a daughter and a son survived. The rest were lost in the holocaust.

Reinitz Armin, whose wife was a daughter of the above-mentioned Reinitz Menyhert, had a daughter my age. We went to school together and were good friends. She was the only one who survived of the family. Her parents were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Mrs. Reinitz Kalman was already retired. All her five children were older than I was. One of the girls went to America in around 1938. Beside her, I think only another girl and boy survived. The rest were victims of Auschwitz.

Roth Miklos and his wife Regina managed their hardware store very successfully. Mr. Roth was active in the Jewish Community affairs. I mentioned him several times before. Their two daughters Gaby and Sziszi went through the lagers with us. From all the four of them, only Gaby survived, lives in Sweden, and her only son lives in the USA. The parents and Sziszi were victims of the holocaust.

Roth Samuel, his wife and their five children were deported to Auschwitz. Only one girl, Jehudit, survived. All the rest were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Mrs. Rosinger Jakob and family owned one of the lumberyards. She had two sons: Rosinger Josef, his wife Etelka and their little boy Gyurika ere all deported to Auschwitz. Rosinger Lajos, his wife Erzsike and their two little girls, Juliana and Katalin, were also all deported to Auschwitz. Of all these nine people, none survived. They were all victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Rosinger Imre, his daughter and two grandsons lived in a big house on Main Street. Daughter Marishka divorced her doctor husband and raised her deceased sister's two boys, Laci and Gyurika.
From this family, only Laci survived. All the others were swallowed up by the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Rosinger Janos, his wife and their only daughter, Sari, were deported to Auschwitz. Only Sari survived. Her parents were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Reichman Vilmos, his wife Bozsi and their two children, Imre and Magda, lived across the street from us. They were not just neighbors, but childhood friends of our parents and grandparents. They also lived in Balkany what seemed liked forever. Born in Balkany, they were raised and grew up together and remained good friends forever. They lived in their own house with a big garden around it and had a business of trade and land produce. They also owned some vineyards. I remember the gathering of the grapes – what a day that used to be. As children, we could hardly wait for it. Mrs. Reichman would cook a meal on the spot, goulash, every year. It was a tradition already. Things like that you never forget.
Mrs. Reiichman survived with her two children, but Mr. Reichman never had a chance. He was sent to the left by Dr. Mengele, in Auschwitz, which meant the gas chambers. It was about the same time that my family and these good neighbors and friends were killed, together. We will never forget or forgive this.

Reichman Gustav, his wife Malvin, their son Bandi and their daughter Marta live right next door to brother Vilmos. They were also across the street from us. Uncle "Guszti", as we called his, was a tinsmith and had a store of cooking-dishes and tinware. He could even fix a hole in a pot or pan. I think that the parents, old Mr. and Mrs. Reichman Mor, bought the

properties for both sons, one next to the other. They built their own houses when they got married. I always thought how beautiful it is to live so close with your family and for the children to grow up together. Again, Mrs. Reichman survived with her two children, but Mr. Reichman had the same fate as his brother who didn't survive.

Old Mr. and Mrs. Reichman Mor didn't live far from their two sons – only a block away. Their daughter, Gizi, stayed wit her parents even after she got married and had two children – Istvan and Eva, about 16 and 11 years old. Gizi's husband, Salgo Bela, took over the grocery and wine and liquor business. He was a very intelligent and handsome man. He became a very good friend of my father, just like the Reichmans. The old Reichmans and Salgo family never had a chance to survive. They were swallowed up by the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Rothman Lipot, his wife and parents.
These parents worked very hard for a living, without a word of complaint. They went to the nearby farms to sell shoelaces, groceries, spices and the like, in exchange for eggs, flour or any farm produce, which they took home to the family. The Rothmans were known as very honest, reliable and good people. They were a nice, big family, but only three boys survived. The rest of them were swallowed up in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Rosenfeld Dezso, his wife and children.
I only knew that he had a horse and wagon and that he delivered for stores and businesses from the big cities. I also remember that he bought, from my grandfather, one of the gramophones with lots of records. Not one person survived from this family.

Schwartz Sandor, his wife and daughter Gizi.
I only remember them as retired people. But their daughter, Gizi, was a dressmaker who worked a lot and I think that's how they made a living. Not one of them survived.

Stern Farkas, his wife "Aunt Ilonka" and family.
I mentioned several times that he was my favorite teacher. His wife, everybody's "Ilonka Neni", was a very sweet lady. They had one girl, Iren, and two boys, Laci and Gyurika. Stern Farkas gave a lot of his time to community affairs. He always served in some type of post for the community. He was a good teacher who taught six grades in one classroom, and was a well liked and popular person. Of the family, only Laci survived. Iren got home too, got married and had a little girl, but it

seems to me that she couldn't get over all the suffering in the lagers, and passed away very young. I don't call this surviving, rather she was another victim of the Holocaust, the way my dear teacher, Ilonka Neni and Gyurika were victims of Auschwitz.

Salamon Izsak, his wife and family were watchmakers. There were two sons and four daughters. One of the girls was my age, we went to school together. The youngest of them all was a very beautiful blond little girl named Cipi. Of this nice, big family, only two girls survived. The rest were victims of the Holocaust.

Dr. Sarudi Laszlo, his wife Magda and their pretty little girl, Julianna. Dr. Sarudi was a practicing doctor in Balkany. He arrived as a single guy, but married Rosinger Magda from the lumberyard. They were a lovely and happy couple expecting their second child when the deportation occurred. They were all lost in the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Smilanski Lajos, his wife and children.
Mr. Smilanski, as a Jewish, Russian soldier in World War I got stuck in Balkany. He stayed on, married a girl from Balkany and had a nice family. He never learned to speak Hungarian well. For us, children, it sounded funny, but he got along well. During the Second World War, he was deported, with the whole Jewish community, to Auschwitz. Mrs. Smilanski survived with two children. But Mr. Smilanski and his son Miklos were victims of the Holocaust.

Tishler Lajos and his wife were a young, married couple with no children yet when deportation came. Mrs. Tishler survived but her husband never came back, lost in the Holocaust.

Teller Samuel, his wife and six children.
I know that Mr. Teller served in forced labor in the "Bor" copper mines, the same time and place as my husband. Mrs. Teller was taken with her six children to the Auschwitz gas chambers. Mr. Teller never got back from Bor. This whole family was lost in the Holocaust.

Ungar David and his wife owned one of the two bakeries in Balkany. They didn't have any children of their own, but decided to take a little niece, adopt her and raise her as their own. Only that girl survived. Mr. and Mrs. Ungar were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Ungar Samuel and his wife had eight children. Of this family of ten, only one boy, Lajos, survived. He was in the forced labor system. Nine members of this family were victims of the Auschwitz gas chamber.

Mr. and Mrs. Wertheimer were old and retired. All their children were on their own. Only one son lived next door to them, whom they enjoyed and loved dearly. What a sweet and lovely couple they were. They never had a chance to survive in Auschwitz.

Wertheimer Samuel and his wife, Margit, had five children. Mr. Wertheimer was a tinsmith and a plumber. He worked hard and they built a beautiful house with an indoor toilet – the only one among the Jewish families. This was his profession and he did it himself. The oldest child, Eva, was my age and we were great friends. Mrs. Wertheimer came from a big city and she was great fun to be with. She would play with us, sing along with us, tell us jokes… She was one of us and we loved her. When she and my mother, who was also a big town girl, got together, they enjoyed each other's company and there was laughter. Mr. Wertheimer and my father were also good friends. They grew up together in Balkany and knew each other from early childhood. Even our grandparents had something special among them.
Of this wonderful family, only one boy, Pali, and two girls, Agi and Erzsike, survived. Eva, my friend, the parents and Judith didn't have a chance. They were all lost in the Holocaust.

Wirthman Ferenc and family had a butcher shop where everyone in the family helped out. There were four boys - Bandi, Laci, Sandor and Janos. From all these people, only Bandi survived. The others were victims of the Holocaust.

Weiss Mor, his wife and family lived on Szakoly Street. All their children were married and away from home. Only Malika, who had a store of her own, was a good seamstress and made ladies undergarments in Balkany. She had two little girls. None of them survived. They were all victims of Auschwitz.

Weiss Marton and family had the only kosher butcher in Balkany. He had a wife and seven children. He was the only survivor in this family. Mrs. Weiss and their seven children were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Weiss Ignac, his wife and children.

I don't know how many children they had. I only know that there was a girl survivor from this family. She happened to be in Ozd with relatives. All the others perished in Auschwitz.

Weinberger Lajos, his wife and children.
They were a young couple with several children. He sold sewing machines. He was the one who provided the gramophone and records for our English course. They weren't in Balkany long, they came from Nagykallo. He was a very intelligent person, with a lovely wife and family. He read a lot. Before he got married, he lived some years in Paris, tried his luck there, but was homesick and came back to Hungary. He was in the forced labor service for years.
From this family, not even one person survived.

Winkler Marton, his wife and three daughters were a lovely family. The middle girl was my age. I think Mr. Winkler was a farm manager. The oldest daughter did the same. The three girls survived, but the parents were victims of the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Mrs. Zafir Aron was a widow. She happened to be Mrs. Winkler's mother. She lived alone. That nice, old lady was deported to Auschwitz, never had a chance.

If I unintentionally forgot anyone or anything of importance, it is probably because I am remembering things that occurred about 60 years ago and I am not getting any younger.
Whatever I wrote is still very vivid in my memory. I did not dramatize events, just gave the bare facts. I'm sure that 20 years ago I could have remembered more but back then I didn't even think of writing about the holocaust. My friend Reichman Imre just recently talked me into it. A Shoa Museum was built in Budapest recently and while he helped build it, he realized that there was nothing written or remembered of our hometown. I listened to my friend and sat down to write. To my surprise, the words just poured out of my pen. I could only write at night, in complete quiet, when everyone was asleep so that I was undisturbed and could cry my eyes out. And now I feel better.

To my children and grandchildren I would like to emphasize how very important a strong Israel is. Please, all of you, make sure to work for a very strong and secure Israel. Only that can prevent a Holocaust from ever happening again.

May 14, 1946
Tornalya, Slovakia

Dear Olga,
I just received your letter dated March 14.
I didn't find, from our beautiful big family, anyone either. I am the only one who got back. The factory is in complete ruins. They robbed me of everyone and everything dear to me. I found out that my dear sister and her whole family, except that one child we took with us to Auschwitz, are alright, thank g-d. I left Balkany and am staying here with my sister and family. At least I have a home. With Balkany I only correspond and they just forwarded your letter to me.

It is very painful to answer your questions because to remember, it tears my wounds open. It is not less painful to remember your dear father, my dearest and most wonderful friend. I said countless times that if he, my best friend, would have come back, I wouldn't run away from Balkany so fast. And because you are my dearest friend's daughter, it is my duty to tell you so that you will clearly and distinctly see the sad situation. Your dear father, with your brothers and grandfather, sadly all found themselves of the left side. What this meant I'm sure you know. But may it be a comfort to you that at least they didn't suffer. You probably heard that we men went through terrible sufferings. The fact that, from Balkany, a nice group of men got into the lagers and from this transport only three of us – Katz Vilmos, Ungar Lajcsi amd I – where somehow in an unusual place, got home. Imagine my dear brother, Jidu, was with me and the poor darling, two weeks before the liberation, couldn't take the horrible tortures and just expired.
I can tell you that this was a lot worse than the gas chambers. At least there they got it over with in minutes. I myself bot home in a condition that no one even recognized me. The doctors gave up on me, but very sadly, even with this I had no luck. The Klein girls, Gitta and Beilu, nursed me for six weeks until I got back to myself, somewhat. My heart is aching that this is the kind of comfort I have to offer, but what can we do? We have to reconcile ourselves to the unchangeable. I want to let you know that ou dear parent's "yahrzeit" is Iyar 23. This year it is May 24th. Should this letter arrive late, light the candles the next evening, while in the future it is always Iyar 23.

In Balkany, you included, 60-70 people survived. This is just about 10%. The men survived mostly in the forced labor service, not from the lagers. From there, five or six came back. That this, according to Dr. Balogh, is a nice amount, is characteristic of our political situation. Imagine if,

according to Dr. Balogh, this is a nice amount, in the eyes of the others how many and how unnecessary we are. Sadly, after such destruction and horrible sufferings, there is no room on earth for us. I firmly decided that I never ever want to Balkany again, in this lifetime. I do have an affidavit to the States but it's very hard to get there. I hear that from Sweden it's easier. Would you be able to get a visa for me? With this you would perform a tremendous favor. Besides this, I really do not need anything else because here, in Slovakia, the situation is really normal – you can get almost anything. My sister and her family are also getting ready to go to the States. They have most of their papers in their possession.

I'll try to give you an account of who the survivors are.

I'll start at the train station street and go in order. This way I might not forget anyone. Klein Bandi, Horowitz Samu 3 girls, Magda got married to Gerle Jeno, Niederman Laci married Stern Iren. Stern Laci married from Hajdunans, Salamon Helen and Iren, 2 Rothman boys. Elbogen Soli is in Germany, Reinitz Fren also in Germany. Reichman Guszti's wife came back with two children. Reinitz Vilma and Miklos Vilma is marrying Weisz Potyu, Reichman Vilmos' wife with two children, her sister Aranka got married to Horovitz Joska, Deutch Helen Feri got married, Klein Gitta and Beilu, Gitta got married to Mezei from Nyiradony, Klein Feri, 3 Houser girls and one boy, Feigu married Frankfort Dovid, Schmilanski with a son and a daughter, 2 Lieff girls and a boy, Grunberger Valvie is in Germany, Csillag Jano, Klein Kalman, Knopfelmacher Laci, Tishler's wife, Rosinger Sari, Wirtman Bandi and Laci were killed in a car accident, Mrs. Heis Adolf, Eisik Sroli, Klein Majshe, Etu is in Sweden, Hochman Bori, Janucsi, Winkler 3 sisters. Sorry, I am finished. I think I did a detailed account. Write about yourselves, what are your plans for the future? What is the emigration situation from there?

With kindest greetings,

Hillel Lichtenstein